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Evaluating the Smart Steps For Stepfamilies: Embrace the Journey Program, a Hierarchical Examination

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EVALUATING THE SMART STEPS FOR STEPFAMILIES: EMBRACE THE JOURNEY PROGRAM, A HIERARCHICAL EXAMINATION

by

Katie L. Reck

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ABSTRACT

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Katie Lin Reck, Doctor of Philosophy

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Major Professors: Dr. Brian Higginbotham and Dr. Jeffrey Dew
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This study examines the experiences of 2,828 ethnically diverse and low-income adults who participated in the *Smart Steps for Stepfamilies: Embrace the Journey* program, a 12-hour stepfamily education program. Self-report measures of relationship quality, couple commitment, and relationship instability were gathered prior to and immediately after the *Smart Steps* intervention as well as six weeks, six months, and one year post-program. Results from multilevel hierarchical analyses suggest that stepfamily participants experienced small but statistically significant increases in relationship quality. These increases in relationship quality, however, reduced to near pre-program levels after one year post-program. Results further showed no statistically significant changes in couple commitment or relationship instability measures. Time results from this study did not differ among examined groups including men, women, age, educational attainment, marital status, number of marriages, ethnic diversity, and individuals of varying SES. Finally a cost-analysis of the *Smart Steps* program was conducted. Application of these findings and policy implications are discussed.

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PUBLIC ABSTRACT

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Over the past decade, relationship education has grown as a means of enhancing couple relations. This study examines the experiences of 2,828 ethnically diverse and low-income adults who participated in the *Smart Steps for Stepfamilies: Embrace the Journey* program, a 12-hour stepfamily education program. Self-report measures of relationship quality, couple commitment, and relationship instability were gathered prior to and immediately after the *Smart Steps* intervention as well as six weeks, six months, and one year post-program. Results suggest that stepfamily participants experienced increases in relationship quality; however, these increases reduced to near pre-program levels one year after the programs completion. Results further showed no changes in couple commitment or relationship instability measures nor among differing participant groups including Latinos, European Americans, low-income, moderate-income, married, unmarried, those in a first marriage, second remarriage, and higher order remarriage. Finally a cost-analysis of the program was conducted. Application of these findings and policy implications are discussed.

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Katie Lin Reck

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Relationship Education (RE), also known as Couple Relationship Education (CRE) or Marriage and Relationship Education (MRE), is a means of assisting individuals to gain skills to sustain healthy couple relationships through evidence-based education (Halford, Markman, Kline, & Stanley, 2003; Halford, Moore, Wilson, Farrugia, & Dyer, 2004; Hawkins, Carroll, Doherty, & Willoughby, 2004; Stanley, 2001). Common skills targeted by RE programming include healthy communication strategies, conflict management, social support, and commitment (Amato & Maynard, 2007; Larson, 2004). By acquiring and nurturing these skills, couples are expected to experience reduced relationship distress, thereby avoiding potentially high personal and social costs related to relationship dissolution (Halford et al., 2003).

In comparison to other western and industrialized nations, the U.S. has the highest rate of marriage (Cherlin, 2009, 2010). According to the most current National Vital Statistics data (2010), the annual marriage rate in the U.S. is 6.8 per 1,000 total population. For those who marry, extant literature has documented pervasive benefits related to healthy relationships including having better physical and mental health, longer life expectancy, greater happiness, and better economic well-being (i.e., higher income, greater levels of wealth and assets, and so forth; Korenman & Neumark, 1991; Lupton & Smith, 2003; Wood, Goesling, & Avellar, 2007; Zimmermann & Easterlin, 2006). Living in a married, two-parent household also provides multiple benefits to children, including lower mortality rates, better overall health, lower rates of deviant behavior, and less likelihood to divorce later in life (Amato, 2010; Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Cherlin, 1999; Fomby & Cherlin, 2007; Manning & Brown, 2006; Manning, Smock, & Majumdar, 2004). Marital relationships are generally more stable than unmarried relationships, leading to healthy couple and child outcomes (Carlson, McLanahan, & England, 2003). Researchers have hypothesized, however, that a potential selection effect may exist among

marrying individuals. Rather than marriage creating stable relationships, couples in stable relationships choose to marry (Wilson & Stuchbury, 2010).

Not only do individuals in the U.S. have one of the highest marriage rates in the world, but they also have one of the highest dissolution rates. Demographers have estimated the lifetime probability of marital breakup to be between 40% and 50% (Cherlin, 2010). Currently, the annual divorce rate is reported to be 3.4 per 1,000 population (National Vital Statistics, 2010). Married adults who break up may incur negative effects including poor physical and mental health, higher levels of substance abuse, lower levels of happiness, social isolation, and economic hardship (Amato, 2000, 2010). Additionally, children may experience poorer emotional, behavioral, social, health, and academic outcomes as a result of parental divorce. Children who grow up in divorced families, in comparison to married families, are for a variety of reasons more likely to gain less education, have lower levels of psychological well-being, and report greater difficulties in their own marriages (Amato, 2010).

Because of the extensive literature establishing potential benefits of marriage, and possible negative outcomes of divorce for both adults and children, scholars and policymakers have invested time and resources into RE programming (Ooms & Wilson, 2004). Historically, RE programs have shown promise in having a positive impact on participating couples. These impacts include improved relationship skills, enhanced couple communication, and increased levels of relationship satisfaction (Halford et al., 2003). However, these findings are limited in a number of ways. First, RE programs historically have served primarily European American, middle- and upper-income married couples (Dion, 2005; Ooms & Wilson, 2004). Most RE programs have not been rigorously evaluated for effectiveness with at-risk populations (i.e., ethnically diverse, low-income, and stepfamilies; Halford et al., 2003; Hawkins, Amato, & Kinghorn, 2013; Hawkins & Ooms, 2012). Second, evaluations have primarily focused on the short-term effectiveness of RE programs. These limitations constrain scholars from

understanding long-term effects and the generalizability of extant findings to diverse types of program participants (Hawkins et al., 2004; Hawkins & Ooms, 2012). In light of these deficits in the RE literature, the objective of this study is to evaluate long-term outcomes of a RE program, serving both European American and Hispanic low-income stepfamilies.

Government Role in Relationship Education

In its beginning stages in the 1950s, religious organizations and therapists predominantly facilitated skills-based RE efforts (DeMaria, 2003; Hunt, Hof, & DeMaria, 1998). By the 1990s, RE became more popular, with approximately one quarter of married couples participating in some form of education to strengthen their relationship (e.g., educational, self-inventory, skills training, and self-help materials; Halford, 1999; Halford et al., 2003; Stanley, 2001). Among remarried couples in Utah, approximately one-fifth attend some form of RE (Higginbotham, Miller, & Niehuis, 2009). RE today has become prominent with both private and public resources extending their reach to the public (Administration of Children & Families, 2005a; Gallagher & Waite, 2000; Hawkins et al., 2004; Markman & Rhoades, 2012).

Interest among U.S. policymakers to broaden the reach of RE has grown (e.g., Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act [PRWOA]; Halford et al., 2003; Halford, Sanders, & Behrens, 2001; Markman & Halford, 2005). Federal involvement in RE efforts began in the mid-nineties when Congress formally recognized marriage as an important foundation for a successful society and the upbringing of children. In 2002, the federal government began to invest in targeted healthy marriage research and programming projects (Myrick, Ooms, & Patterson, 2009). By 2005, President George W. Bush and the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) established the Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI), which was commissioned to assist couples in accessing RE services in an effort to support and sustain healthy marriages. As part of

this initiative, new funding streams have provided an array of opportunities for the development, expansion, and evaluation of RE programs (ACF, 2005b; Myrick et al., 2009).

One such funding stream, allocated by Congress through the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, established competitive grant programs for promoting healthy marriages. Two of these programs entitled "Healthy Marriage Demonstration Grants" (HHS-2006-ACF-OFA-FE-0033) and "Head Start Healthy Marriage Initiative Project Grants" (HHS-2007-ACF-OHS-YD-0040) allowed for the implementation of healthy marriage programs to targeted groups. As defined in the request for proposals, targeted groups included individuals, couples, and youth from at-risk and underserved populations such as immigrant, low-income, and families with special needs. More specifically, the Head Start Healthy Marriage Initiative Project Grant targeted fragile family groups including single parent, teenage parent, unwed, new or expectant parents, low-income families, and racially and ethnically diverse families. By definition, fragile families are at risk of having lower education, less social support, higher likelihood of children born outside of marriage, and having multiple children from different fathers (McLanahan & Garfinkel, 2000; McLanahan, Garfinkel, & Mincy, 2001). By targeting fragile at-risk populations, policymakers were attempting to reach a broad audience in order to determine who could benefit most from RE programming.

As part of the criteria for receiving competitive federal grant funds, applicants implemented clear evaluation protocols to measure the effectiveness of the RE programs. This evaluation process could include an array of measurable variables including pre- and post-test designs comparing participant relationship knowledge, relationship stability, and quality. Administration officials expressed hope that policymakers could use the data to inform the field as to what works best in healthy marriage programming and how participants were impacted.

With the establishment of these competitive grants, the federal government provided practitioners, researchers, and policymakers a context in which in-depth examinations of RE

programs could be accomplished. In doing so, specific questions regarding the cost effectiveness of these programs could be answered. Professionals have historically advocated for further evaluations of RE programming, including cost-effectiveness, in relation to the potentially negative effects of relationship dissolution (Amato & Maynard, 2007; Brotherson & Duncan, 2004; Furstenberg, 2007; Larson, 2004; Robertson et al., 2006).

Current Study

The current study provides a longitudinal analysis of the *Smart Steps for Stepfamilies: Embrace the Journey* (*Smart Steps*) program (see Appendix A for IRB approval form). *Smart Steps* was used in two federally funded RE projects entitled "Teaching Healthy Marriage Skills to Ethnically Diverse, Low-Income Couples in Stepfamilies" (Grant No. 90FE0129) and "Teaching Healthy Marriage Skills to Low-Income, Hispanic Couple in Stepfamilies" (Grant No. 90YD0227). As per the goal of the Healthy Marriage Initiative, these programs provided RE services to improve and sustain healthy couple relationships. The overarching objective of the current study is to evaluate the long-term effects of the *Smart Steps* program among groups of participants who differ by ethnicity, gender, number of marriages, and socio-economic status on measured relationship outcome variables (i.e., relationship quality, commitment, and instability). This study will also examine the cost of the *Smart Steps* program. Although funding for the current study was provided, in large part, by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (grants 90FE0129 and 90YD0227); the opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations do not necessarily reflect the views of the Administration for Children and Families.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relationship Education

The following literature review will provide a brief history of general research in RE, the outcomes of these studies, the current status of the RE field, and the limitations and gaps of this literature. Next, research that is specific to the current study is reviewed by targeted groups, remarriage and stepfamilies, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and gender. Current research regarding relationship outcome variables relevant to the current study will also be reviewed (i.e., quality, commitment, and instability). It is the goal of this literature review to provide the reader with a thorough understanding of past RE programming, current RE programming, RE among specific population groups, and research regarding specific relationship outcomes as it relates to targeted population groups.

Relationship Education: Historical Findings

First established in the early 1950s, RE has provided resources to couples over the past century. However, it was not until the late 1970s and 1980s that practitioners and scholars began to empirically examine RE programming. One of the earliest meta-analyses examining the effects of RE was published by Giblin, Sprenkle, and Sheehan in 1985. According to their findings of 85 RE studies, on average, RE programs were found to have an effect size of .44 (high of .96 and low of .007) which indicated that on average participants in RE were better off following the intervention than those who did not.

By the late 1980s RE program development and evaluation had become widespread. In 1990, Guerney and Maxson provided a decade review, discussing program methodologies, interpretations, populations served, formats, and program effectiveness. These authors verified

the findings of Giblin et al. (1985) in that RE had the ability to assist couple relationships. As a conclusion to their review, the authors provided recommendations to the field, specifically calling for future research to examine: (1) which programs work best for different populations; (2) what makes programs effective; (3) how programs can be made more efficient and less costly; and (4) how programs can be better marketed. In conclusion, the authors stated, "There is no doubt that, on the whole, enrichment programs work and the field is an entirely legitimate one" (p. 1133).

By the mid 2000s new developments in program design and research led to an increased understanding of RE and provided new answers to the questions posed by Guerney and Maxson (1990). During this time, increases in the federal government's interest in RE as a means of assisting needy families required additional evidence of RE effectiveness. Reardon-Anderson, Stagner, Macomber, and Murray (2005), in their meta-analysis of 39 RE program evaluations, provided evidence regarding RE's effectiveness in improving relationship satisfaction and communication. More rigorous than previous analyses, this meta-analysis examined studies that incorporated either a treatment/control group design or a high quality quasi-experimental design. In their findings, Reardon-Anderson et al. (2005) reported significant overall effect sizes of .68 for relationship satisfaction (N = 28) and .26 for communication (N = 13). Studies with a longitudinal component, on average, reported an effect size of .29 for relationship satisfaction (N = 5) and .11 for communication (N = 2). These findings confirmed previous reports indicating that RE leads to positive effects in relationship satisfaction and communication for couples.

Although this study confirmed previous positive findings in RE, limitations remained in Reardon-Anderson and colleagues' (2005) analysis. First, because of the rigorous nature of their selection process, the initial number of programs included in the analysis was small (N = 39). Second, of the programs included, none targeted low-income couples. Third, very few of the selected programs (N = 7) incorporated follow-up evaluation designs, therefore, limiting analysis of long-term effectiveness. Due to these limitations, Reardon-Anderson and colleagues (2005)

suggested further analysis was needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of RE.

In 2008, Hawkins, Blanchard, Baldwin, and Fawcett published a meta-analysis using 117 studies. They focused on the effects of RE on couple communication and relationship satisfaction/quality. In their analysis, the authors concluded that RE programming positively affected relationship satisfaction/quality and communication, demonstrating positive average effects of .297 and .447 respectively. Unlike the Reardon-Anderson (2005) analysis, this study provided an examination of the lasting effects of RE. Longitudinal findings of RE programming (up to 6 months post-program) from this meta-analysis found overall positive effects for both relationship satisfaction and communication.

Although Hawkins et al. (2008) provided the most comprehensive RE evaluation to date, limitations remain in their analysis. First, only a limited number of programs included follow-up data over six-months post-program. Second, the samples used within the RE studies did not incorporate large samples of ethnically diverse populations. Only seven of the studies incorporated samples of more than 25% ethnically diverse individuals. Finally, studies did not focus on economically diverse families; only two of the studies incorporated predominantly low-income couples.

In addition to Hawkins et al. (2008) meta-analysis, more recent studies have added to the RE knowledge base. In a an analysis of 15 RE programs that target low-income couples, Hawkins and Fackrell (2010) reported positive overall program effect sizes between .250 and .293 on self-reported measures of relationship quality, commitment, stability, and communication. However, the authors noted these findings are only preliminary in that many of the RE programs which were included in this analysis had yet to finish data collection.

A meta-analysis study of 50 Office of Family Assistance demonstration grant RE programs conducted by Hawkins and Fellows (2011) showed moderate short-term effects on

program participants (d = .40). Overall, these programs targeted nearly 50,000 primarily low-income populations using pre- and post-test data on a variety of outcome variables including relationship quality, communication, relationship confidence, aggression, unhealthy relationship knowledge, and co-parenting. Moderate dosage programs, providing 9 to 20 hours of RE programming, were shown to have somewhat higher effects than lower dosage programs.

A final meta-analysis of note in describing current RE literature was published by Hawkins and colleagues (2012) exploring programmatic moderators of the effectiveness of RE programs. In this evaluation of 148 RE reports, factors that contributed to positive intervention effects were examined. Overall, program dosage was found to be a significant moderator of program effects. Stronger RE effects were found in moderate-dosage programs that included between 9 and 20 contact hours, in comparison to low-dosage RE programs (1 to 8 contact hours). These researchers concluded that the general dosage of 12 hours of RE programming seems to be appropriate for White, middle-class, and relatively non-distressed couples. However, as suggested by Hawkins et al. (2012) programs with greater dosages may be more effective for disadvantaged or distressed couples.

Although research examining RE has increased dramatically over the past three decades, limitations remain. For example, many programs still need to conduct longitudinal analyses which are necessary in determining long-term effectiveness. In a review conducted by Halford et al. (2003), only a dozen RE programs could be found that had evaluation data lasting over six-months and only five over one year. Among these studies, findings were mixed in regard to longitudinal effectiveness. Four of the five studies found that knowledge gained lasted over a five-year period (Hahlweg, Markman, Thurmair, Engel & Eckert, 1998; Halford et al., 2001; Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993; Stanley et al., 2001); however the fifth study found no effect after 2 years (van Widenfelt, Hosman, Schaap, & van der Staak, 1996). Since the publication of Halford et al. (2003) other published data (e.g., Halford & Wilson, 2009;

Reardon-Anderson et al., 2005) has examined the longitudinal effects of RE, again demonstrating mixed results in longitudinal effectiveness of RE.

These mixed results of the long-term effectiveness of RE demonstrates a need for further examination in order to clarify the potential long-term impacts of RE programs. Scholars have noted the discrepancies in longitudinal RE findings and continue to emphasize the need for additional longitudinal evaluations among RE programs (Halford & Wilson, 2009; Hawkins & Ooms, 2012; Hawkins et al., 2012). As evidence of this need, Hawkins and colleagues noted that 40% of published results from RE programs did not include any follow-up data.

A second limitation of current RE literature is the lack of published studies that target a diversity of families, including different family types (i.e., remarried and stepfamilies), ethnically diverse families, and families of different socio-economic levels. Although within the past decade this literature has significantly grown (see Bradley, Friend, & Gottman, 2011; Hawkins & Fackrell, 2010; Hawkins & Ooms, 2010, 2012, Whitton, Nicholson, & Markman, 2008), particularly with the assistance of federal grants targeting ethnically diverse and low-income populations (Myrick et al., 2009), there remains a dearth of current knowledge on programmatic effectiveness. Of particular interest among practitioners is whether programs that were developed for European American middle-class families can also be effective for couples in stepfamilies, ethnically diverse, and low-income populations (Hawkins et al., 2008; Hawkins & Ooms, 2012). As demonstrated by the Hawkins and colleagues' (2008; Hawkins, Stanley, Blanchard, & Albright, 2012) meta-analyses, insufficient data regarding racial/ethnic and socio-economic diversity in the study samples prevented the authors from deriving reliable conclusions regarding the effectiveness of RE for those populations. Although the number of studies targeting non-White and low-income populations is increasing (Hawkins & Fackrell, 2010), currently, only a small number of published studies have significant numbers of these populations groups (Hawkins et al., 2012). This limitation in the field as stated by Hawkins et al. (2008) is "a crucial

deficit in the body of research" (p. 723).

Relationship Education: Targeted Groups and Relationship Outcomes

Although a vast amount of literature exists regarding RE, this literature is focused predominantly on European American and middle- to upper-income populations. Couples in stepfamilies, ethnically diverse families, and families from differing socio-economic statuses remain under-researched. In order to provide a full understanding of what is known about these population groups, a review of related research and RE studies for each is provided. In addition, outcome variables that are relevant to the current study are reviewed namely relationship quality, couple commitment, and relationship instability. Finally, reported findings regarding costs of RE is provided.

Targeted Groups

Remarried couples and stepfamilies. The American family has become increasingly diverse over the past half century, experiencing an array of changing trends in divorce, marriage, and remarriage. The United States currently has the highest remarriage rate in the world with approximately 29% of all current marriages being a remarriage for at least one spouse (Kreider, 2006) and 10% of all remarriages being a third or higher order remarriage (National Center for Health Statistics, 1993). According to one estimate, between one-third and one-half of all marriages today include one previously married partner (Kreider & Ellis, 2011). Approximately 2.1 million couples marry in the U.S. each year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Of those who marry, approximately 40% of first marriages and 60% of second and higher order marriages (three or more) will divorce (Greene, Anderson, Hetherington, Forgatch, & DeGarmo, 2003; Kreider & Fields, 2002).

Historically, researchers have found couples who enter into a remarriage tend to be more likely to have less stable relationships than couples who enter into a first marriage (Bulanda &

Brown, 2007; Bumpass & Raley, 2007; Goodwin, Mosher, & Chandra, 2010; Slattery, Bruce, Halford, & Nicholson, 2011; Sweeney, 2010; van Eeden-Moorefield & Pasley, 2008). For example, for women who marry men who have been formerly married, the probability that their marriage will remain intact 1 year later is .93; ten years later, it is .60. In comparison, for women who marry men who have not been formerly married, the probability that their marriage will remain intact 1 year later is .95; .64 ten years later. Similarly, men who marry women who have been formerly married have lower rates of marital survival; .96 marital survival rate one year after marriage and .74 five years after marriage. Comparatively, men who marry women who have not been formerly married have a .94 likelihood of marriage lasting 1 year; .80 lasting 5 years (Goodwin et al., 2010). A number of contributing factors may provide insight into why those who remarry are more likely to divorce than those who do not. Some of these contributing factors include unclear norms and social expectations, greater familial complexity, differences in symbolic meanings, few cultural and legal guidelines, difficulties in managing power and loyalty, and greater boundary ambiguity (Cherlin, 1978, 2004; Ganong & Coleman, 2004; Sweeney, 2005, 2010; Visher, Visher, & Pasley, 2003).

Among couples in which one or both individuals are marrying for a second time or more (i.e., higher-order remarriage), many of these factors are heightened in that there may be multiple ex-partners, increased ambiguity, and overall greater complexity of the remarriage and stepfamily situation. Although scholars have not readily examined higher-order remarriages, the literature regarding multiple divorces on individual outcomes has shown that with an increased number of divorces, individuals experience greater risks of poor health, lower well-being, as well as increased negative outcome for their children (e.g., at-risk behavior; Capaldi & Patterson, 1991; Kurdek, Fine, & Sinclair, 1995; Tumin, 2011). Scholars have suggested that those who divorce multiple times may differ on key dimensions in comparison to those who only divorce once (Ambert, 2009); similarly, those who remarry multiple times may be different from those who

remarry only once (e.g., personality characteristics and marital attitude; Brody, Neubaum, & Forehand, 1988).

Among couples who remarry, the majority are likely to have children from a previous relationship (Halford et al., 2003; U.S. Census Bureau, 2007; Whitton et al., 2008). Stepfamilies are one of the fastest growing family types in the United States, with four-in-ten adults having at least one step relationship within their family (e.g., stepparent, a step or half sibling, or a stepchild; Parker, 2011) and an estimated 4.3 million children being a stepchild (Teachman & Tedrow, 2008). Of those couples who remarry, 50% of women and 47% of men are estimated to have at least one child from a previous relationship (Kreider, 2006).

With the occurrence of remarriage, and the possible creation of a stepfamily, individuals are likely to experience both positive and negative outcomes. Marriage is generally associated with greater security and higher overall well-being among both first married and remarried couples (Barrett, 2000; Dupre & Meadows, 2007; Hughes & Waite, 2009; van Eeden-Moorefield, Pasley, Dolan, & Engel, 2007; Vogler, 2005; Williams & Umberson, 2004). Children living within married couple relationships also are more likely to experience lower levels of poverty than those in single parent families (8.2% versus 35.2%; Rector, Johnson, & Fagan, 2002). On the other hand, with the creation of a stepfamily, a number of difficulties may be experienced that are not otherwise experienced in biological or first marriage families including changes in parenting roles, expectations, stepparent-stepchild relationship development, dealing with ex-spouses, finances, and lack of family and social support (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004; Ganong & Coleman, 2004).

As previously discussed, the likelihood of marital survival among couples who are in a remarriage is lower than those entering into a first marriage (see Goodwin et al., 2010). Furthermore, when a marriage includes children from a previous relationship, whether a first marriage or a remarriage, the odds of marital survival are even lower. Individuals who marry a

partner with children from a previous relationship generally experience decreased stability and relationship quality over time (Falk & Larson, 2007; Goodwin et al., 2010). According to Goodwin et al., women marrying men with children from a previous relationship have a marital survival rate of .92 after 1 year; by year 10 this probability is decreased to .54. When comparing those findings to results for women who marry men without children from a previous relationship, the marital survival rate is .95 one year after marriage and .65 ten years later. Men who marry women with children from a previous relationship have a .93 probability of marital survival in the first year of marriage; .71 at 5 years. For men marrying women without children, the probability of marital survival increases to .95 one year after marriage and .80 five years after marriage (Goodwin et al., 2010).

Relationship education targeting remarried couples and stepfamilies has increased over the past two decades, with publications regarding the effectiveness of these programs emerging over the past five years. One of the first of these publications, Whitton et al. (2008) examined 22 studies of RE programs targeting stepfamilies and reported positive findings related to couples attendance in stepfamily RE, namely improved understanding of relationship issues, remarital and stepfamily expectations, skills, social support, family environment, closeness, marital adjustment, communication, conflict management, parenting, marital satisfaction, relationship quality, coparenting, hope, and family cohesion as well as reduced non-adaptive beliefs, stepfamily problems, stress, and anxiety. More recent studies have expanded this literature reporting RE's ability to improve couple commitment levels, agreement on key relationship issues (e.g., finances and parenting), ability to deal with ex-spouses, child behavior problems, instability, confidence in partner, overall relationship happiness, and other measures (Adler-Baeder et al., 2010; Bullard et al., 2010; Higginbotham & Adler-Baeder, 2008, 2010; Higginbotham & Skogrand, 2010; Nicholson, Phillips, Whitton, Halford, & Sanders, 2007; Skogrand, Davis, & Higginbotham, 2011; Skogrand, Torres, & Higginbotham, 2010).

Most recently in 2012, Lucier-Greer and Adler-Baeder published a meta-analysis of 14 studies of stepfamily RE programs. Findings from this study showed small, but statistically significant overall effects in both comparison-group and one-group/pre- and post-programs on family, parental, and couple functioning outcomes. However, these authors note the need for additional empirical knowledge regarding stepfamily functioning, effectiveness of stepfamily RE programming, and the need for an ecocultural lens and long-term follow-up procedures in stepfamily RE programming. Lucier-Greer, Adler-Baeder, Ketring, Harcourt, and Smith (2012) furthermore examined the experiences of couples in different types of remarriages (i.e., one spouse remarried and both spouses remarried) versus those in first-marriages. Their findings indicate that both first married and remarried couples similarly benefit on targeted RE outcomes, including individual empowerment, depression, relational confidence, trust, and parental efficacy. Similar to Lucier-Greer and Adler-Baeder's meta-analysis, this study emphasized the need for further examination of longitudinal outcomes, diverse populations, as well as further examination of the interactions of differing demographic characteristics of participants (e.g., marital and relationship history, current marital status, income level, gender, race, and length of marriage in RE).

European American and Latino families. Although the majority of U.S. residents today consider themselves Caucasian, or of European American descent (approximately 244,298,000 people), the U.S. has increasingly growing minority populations. The U.S. Census currently estimates several predominant minority groups, including over 39 million African American individuals (7.1% increase since 2000), over 3 million American Indian and Alaskan Natives (18.3% increase), over 14 million Asians (32.3% increase), and over half a million Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders (25% increase). Individuals who identify themselves as Hispanic or of Latino descent consist of nearly 48.5 million individuals (37.1% increase) and are now considered the largest minority population within the U.S., with approximately 14% of the total

population being of Latino descent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006, 2010). By 2015 the Latino population is expected to increase to over 57.7 million individuals (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

With this increasing minority population it is important to understand potential differences between minority and the still majority, primarily European-origin population. For example, family formation has been known to differ between ethnic groups with Latino families historically reporting higher rates of cohabitation, divorce, and unwed childbearing than European American families (Landale & Oropesa, 2007; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). According to estimates from Elliott and Lewis (2010), approximately 80.3% of ever married individuals reported being European American; 12.2% reported being Hispanic or of Latino origin. Among Latinos, it is expected that approximately 42% will divorce within the first 15 years of marriage with an even higher number becoming legally separated (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; McNamee & Raley, 2011). Latinos generally have higher rates of separation (3.7% compared to 1.5%) and never married individuals (38% versus 26.3%) than European Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). A number of reasons exist as to why these groups differ in regard to family formation and relationship dissolution. Latino families, like most minority groups, are considered an at-risk population with higher rates of marital violence (Klevens, 2007), lower education levels, higher unemployment rates, lower wages, and have higher poverty rates than European American families (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003; Wolff, 2000).

In addition to the current marital and divorce rates, extant literature has documented the differences in relationship quality among differing ethnic groups. Research generally shows that European American populations have higher relationship quality and stability than do other ethnic groups (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003; Osborne, Manning, & Smock, 2007; Phillips & Sweeney, 2005; Raley & Bumpass, 2003). Stanley, Amato, Johnson, and Markman (2006) showed that Hispanic populations have statistically significant lower marital quality scores than European Americans (b = -.55; $p < .001$) when controlling for marriage in religious setting,

length of marriage, education level, gender, previous marriages, and need for public assistance. Scholars have furthermore suggested that ethnicity may be an indicator of a number of greater societal challenges and stressors that may spill over into relationship stability and quality, including limited economic resources (Bulanda & Brown, 2007; Oropesa & Gorman, 2000; Oropesa & Landale, 2004; Reschovsky, Hadley, & Nichols, 2007), lower education levels (Gándara & Contreras, 2009), parental divorce, cohabitation, and so forth (Orbuch, Veroff, Hassan, & Horrocks, 2002). Other factors such as acculturation and nativity may also affect perceptions of marriage among Latinos (Osborne et al., 2007; Skogrand, Torres et al., 2010). Latino families may also significantly differ from European American families in social experiences including discrimination and legalization issues (Gil, Wagner, & Vega, 2000; Perez, Fortuna, & Alegria, 2008).

Although Latino populations are generally more disadvantaged than non-Latino populations, a number of cultural factors may contribute to positive relationship outcomes (e.g., religiosity, familism, socialization, and collectivism; Bulanda & Brown, 2007). For example, religiosity is found to positively relate to marital stability and quality (Adelmann, Chadwick, & Baerger, 1996; Broman, 2005; Dollahite, Marks, & Goodman, 2004). Other cultural factors such as religiosity, collectivism, and familism may also play a positive role within Latino familial relationships (Landale, Oropesa, & Bradatan, 2006; Skogrand, Barrios-Bell, & Higginbotham, 2009).

Latino stepfamilies. According to the 2008 American Community Survey [ACS], of those Hispanics who ever married, 83.6% married once, 14.13% married twice, and 2.35% married three or more times. In comparison, 73.46% of non-Hispanic Whites married once, 20.68% married twice, and 5.95% married three or more times. Furthermore, of all divorced Hispanics, 49.5% are remarried in comparison to 60.62% of all divorced non-Hispanic Whites. Although these population estimates suggest that Latinos are not remarrying as often as European

Americans, this does not mean that Latinos are not repartnering. According to this same 2008 ACS survey, among all divorced Hispanics, 10.76% were cohabiting and 39.95% were single in comparison to 8.27% of cohabitating non-Hispanic Whites and 31.12% single non-Hispanic Whites (Elliot & Lewis, 2010).

In examining the prevalence of stepfamilies specifically, it is somewhat difficult to determine the exact number of stepfamilies for both European American and Latino populations because of the lack of census data. Current estimates suggest an increasing number of children are born to nonmarried parents and are raised in homes that consist of individuals who are not biologically related. Among Latinos, 45% of children are born outside of marriage. According to McNamee and Raley (2011), approximately 38% of Latino and 27% of European American women have at least one premarital birth. Children today are more likely to have a parent living outside the household than ever before (Cherlin, 2010), with an estimated 42% of Latino women and 34% of Latino men reporting growing up in a type of living arrangement other than a two parent household (European Americans reported 45% for women and 43% for men respectively; Goodwin et al., 2010). These estimates demonstrate a large number of potential stepfamilies within both European American and Latino populations.

Many of the challenges experienced by couples in stepfamilies are similar regardless of ethnicity (e.g., defining the family, social support, having realistic expectations, dealing with the stepparent-stepchild relationship, dealing with the couple relationships, and dealing with ex-spouses). Still, in studying diverse populations, RE scholars have noted the importance of understanding ethnic differences and how programs can effectively meet these group's needs (Skogrand et al., 2009). RE targeting Latino stepfamily populations specifically has only recently begun to document the positive effects for adults and children (e.g., improved parenting practices, communication, and empathy; Duncan, Steed, & Needham, 2009; Eisenberg & Falciglia, 2010; Hawkins et al., 2008; Higginbotham & Adler-Baeder, 2008, 2010; Higginbotham & Skogrand,

2010; Higginbotham, Skogrand, & Torres, 2010; Kotrla, Dyer, & Stelzer, 2010; Moitinho, 2000; Skogrand, Dansie, Higginbotham, Davis, & Barrios-Bell, 2011; Skogrand, Torres et al., 2010). Because the majority of RE programming has only recently begun to document the effects of RE on ethnically diverse stepfamilies, this literature, in comparison to the knowledge base on European American families in RE remains undeveloped.

Socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status (SES) is one of many factors that has historically played an important role in family life outcomes. Generally measured by education and income indicators, SES plays a fundamental role in human functioning across the lifespan (American Psychological Association [APA], 2007). Poverty and economic inequality is of current concern to many scholars who examine the changing dynamic of the family. Current estimates of median household income within the U.S. have recognized a number of changes over the past 20 years, with an increasing income gap between the top 5% of the U.S. population and the bottom 40%. Poverty has fluctuated dramatically over the past two decades, with the late 1990s showing significant decreases in poverty followed by dramatic increases in the late 2000s. By 2008 it was estimated that more than half of all Americans lived in poverty at some age (Rank, 2009). Other estimates indicate that 13.2% of all adults and 19% of all children in the U.S. currently live in poverty (i.e., approximately 40 million Americans). African Americans, Hispanics, female-headed households, and noncitizens are reported as having the highest likelihood of living in poverty (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Lee, 2008; Sherman, Greenstein, Trisi, & Van de Water, 2009).

For families who experienced sustained periods of poverty, the effects can be drastic. For example, low levels of SES are linked to a number of negative family outcomes including negative child and adolescent cognitive and interpersonal development, participation in at-risk behaviors, and poor physical and mental health (Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, & Simons, 1994; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; McLoyd, 1998;

McLoyd, Jayaratne, Ceballo, & Borquez, 1994). Among couples with low SES there are fewer marriages and remarriages (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989; Burstein, 2007), greater marital instability, increased stressors (Fagan, 2006), and greater risk for marital discord and dissatisfaction (Lichter & Carmalt, 2009). In comparison, couples with higher SES levels experience a number of positive outcomes including overall better health, lower mortality, and greater access to goods and services (Sapolsky, 2005).

Income is part of a larger social context in which individual relationships are embedded, thus it can have important influences on the commitment process (Umana-Taylor & Fine, 2003). In general, individuals with higher levels of income report increased levels of commitment in marriage than those in low-income situations (Nock, 1995). Furthermore, couples with higher levels of income and economic opportunity experience higher levels of marital stability and overall relationship happiness (Graham, 1997; Oppenheimer, 1997; White & Rogers, 2000).

Because of the differences experienced between SES groups, scholars and policymakers have called for extended research, education, practices, and public policies addressing SES issues (APA, 2007). Research and programming in the field of RE has historically targeted middle- to upper-income couples and only recently begun to examine RE effectiveness among low-income individuals (Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Dion, 2005; Halford et al., 2003; Halford, Markman, & Stanley, 2008; Ooms & Wilson, 2004; Reardon-Anderson et al., 2005). Recent RE findings among low-income populations suggest that RE can be effective in reducing negative communication among couples, improve bonding (Einhorn, 2010), increase happiness, warmth, support, lower marital distress, experience fewer negative behaviors (Hsueh et al., 2012), and reduce the likelihood of divorce (Stanley, Allen, Markman, Rhoades, & Prentice, 2010). According to meta-analytic results by Hawkins and Fackrell (2010), RE was found to have small-to-moderate effects among low-income participants on relationship quality and communication measures. These findings suggest that effects of RE among low-income couples can be similar to

those of middle-income participants, supporting ideas that RE programming can be generalized to fit an array of populations. Hawkins and Fackrell noted, however, that additional research is needed in order to effectively determine whether these positive effects are similar among differing SES groups in the long-term.

Gender. Throughout the extant literature, scholars have discussed the inherent differences between men's and women's experience within marriage (Fine & Harvey, 2006; Helweg-Larsen, Harding, & Klein, 2011; Schramm & Adler-Baeder, 2012; Sweeney, 2010). Scholars have historically hypothesized that marriage is more advantageous for men than women (e.g., Bernard 1972; Gove, 1972; Nock, 1998); however, recent reports indicate that both men and women experience similar benefits from marriage, including increased physical and mental health as well as greater overall well-being (see Fincham & Beach, 2010; Gallagher & Waite, 2000). Perceptions of marriage and the need to marry among men and women differ in today's context in comparison to historical views, particularly because of increases in women's education, workforce participation, as well as changes in social expectations (Kaufman & Goldscheider, 2007).

As demonstrated through extant literature, gender differences exist in economic, emotional, and familial motivations to remarry (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). Men generally remarry more quickly and at higher rates than women (Ganong & Coleman, 2004; Sweeney, 2005). Women with children from a previous marriage, in comparison to men, are less likely to marry than those without children (Ganong & Coleman, 2004; Goldscheider & Kaufman, 2006). Among individuals who have experienced a parental divorce and remarriage, women generally report lower levels of commitment and confidence in marriage than men (Whitton, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2008). Ethnically diverse couples also differ in regard to gender, specifically in the values and gender roles placed within the family, particularly among highly

religious and traditional cultures (e.g., familism and machismo; Oropesa & Gorman, 2000; Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002).

One of the most reported differences among genders is in socioeconomic well-being. Men on average experience greater economic stability than women (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2008). Women generally experience lower SES than men, make less money on average, and have higher rates of poverty than men (APA, 2007; Bastos, Casaca, Nunes, & Pereirinha, 2009; DeNavas-Walt et al., 2008). One exception to these findings is among couples in long-lasting marital relationships. Among these couples, similar rates of poverty are experienced for both men and women (Rank & Hirschl, 2001).

Marriage educators generally agree that by becoming aware of gender differences within marriage, participants will enhance their communication and relationship patterns (Ooms, 2005). In examining current RE literature regarding gender differences, findings from the field are somewhat inconsistent. A number of published RE evaluations have found little to no gender differences among program participants on relationship outcomes (Baucom, Atkins, Hahlweg, Engel, & Thurmaier, 2006; Hawkins et al., 2008; McGeorge & Carlson, 2006; Schulz, Cowan, & Cowan, 2006; Stanley et al., 2005; Thuen & Lærum, 2005). RE practitioners interpret these nonsignificant findings as positive, however, in that both men and women can equally benefit from RE and program content can then target general topics that are appropriate for both sexes (e.g., positive communication skills; Adler-Baeder, Higginbotham, & Lamke, 2004). Where significant gender differences are reported, scholars indicate greater interest in and motivation to attend RE among women as well as significant differences in couple commitment and couples agreement on relationship skills (e.g., parenting; Duncan, Box, & Silliman, 1996; Halford et al., 2001, 2004; Higginbotham & Skogrand, 2010; Larson & Holman, 1994; Morris, Cooper, & Gross, 1999; Stanley et al., 2005, 2006).

Relationship Outcomes

Scholars have historically measured the effectiveness of RE in a number of ways. The most common among these outcomes include changes in conflict, family closeness, marital adjustment, parenting, communication, knowledge gained on a specific relationship topic (e.g., parenting), relationship satisfaction, quality, coping, cohesion, anxiety, and family interactions (see Hawkins et al., 2008; Reardon-Anderson et al., 2005; Whitton et al., 2008). For the purposes of this review, only those variables relevant to the current study will be examined, namely relationship quality, couple commitment, and relationship stability.

Relationship quality. One of the most universal means of measuring RE success is through relationship quality. Historically scholars have documented an array of factors which contribute to high quality relationships including personal attitudes, conflict, communication, coping, and so forth (Amato & Rogers, 1999; Bodenmann, Charvoz, Cina, & Widmer, 2001; Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Leidy, Parke, Cladis, Coltrane, & Duffy, 2009; Neff & Karney, 2004, 2007). Building on this literature, the majority of RE today focuses on basic relationship skills in order to affect couples' relationship quality (Markman & Rhoades, 2012).

The ability of RE to improve relationship quality is widely published (see Blanchard, Hawkins, Baldwin, & Fawcett, 2009; Hawkins et al., 2008; Stanley et al., 2006). As described by Hawkins and colleagues (2008) meta-analysis of 117 studies, RE was found to have significant effects on couple relationship quality and communication, with no gender differences found). An important limitation of this research, however, is that a majority of RE programming serve couples who are already in high quality relationships (Stanley et al., 2006).

Couple commitment. Rather than focusing specifically on relationship quality, some scholars have concentrated on couple commitment. Relationship commitment is a multidimensional phenomenon and is generally described as having devotion to one's romantic

partner (Downs, 2004). Trends in commitment within marriage have varied over the past half century, with fewer couples divorcing than in previous decades. However, this does not necessarily mean that the divorce rate is in fact decreasing; rather many authors suspect that couples are choosing to remain in unmarried, cohabitating relationships (Cherlin, 2010). Couples in cohabitating relationships generally report lower levels of commitment in comparison to married couples (Lundberg & Pollak, 2013). Although these trends demonstrate a lack of commitment among couples, the desire to be in a committed relationship remains high (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001).

Relationship education research focusing on couple commitment has demonstrated an ability to assist couples in maintaining strong committed relationships (e.g., Goddard & Olsen, 2004; Halford et al., 2004; Harris, Simons, Willis, & Banie, 1992; Johnson et al., 2002; Markman & Rhoades, 2012; Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 2001; Markman, Stanley, Jenkins, Petrella, & Wadsworth, 2006; Stanley, 2001). However, the majority of these studies focus on couples who are already in married relationships, therefore missing a large population of couples who experience lower levels of commitment (Markman & Rhoades, 2012). For example, married couples generally report the highest level of commitment in comparison to other relationship types (Poortman & Mills, 2012; Skinner, 2002; Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004) whereas remarried couples and couples with stepchildren generally report lower levels of commitment (Booth & Edwards, 1992). Levels of commitment vary; therefore, RE may need to be adapted to the unique needs of the targeted population regarding commitment. As noted by Hawkins and colleagues (2012), only a small number of RE programs directly target commitment in effecting healthy couple relationships, and even fewer have formally published evidence indicating the effectiveness of improving commitment levels. Future research, as suggested by these authors, should remedy this evidence gap.

Relationship stability. A variation of couple commitment which is commonly examined

within RE is relationship stability. Commitment focuses on the general devotion toward a partner whereas stability focuses on an individual's perception that their relationship will result in dissolution (Booth & Edwards, 1985). A number of factors are known to effect relationship stability including sexual activity, premarital birth, cohabitation, racial and religious heterogamy, age at marriage, educational attainment and religiosity (Heaton, 2002; Heaton & Pratt, 1990) as well as more broadly defined factors such as couple interactions, stressful life events, individual characteristics (e.g., personality, family-of-origin), contextual variables (e.g., culture), and social support (Halford, 1999). Among stepfamily couples specifically, additional factors such as parent-stepchild bonding and stepfamily complexity (i.e., children from both spouses) influences relationship stability (Slattery et al., 2011). Although some of these factors cannot be readily changed (e.g., family-of-origin), RE practitioners focus on factors that can be readily influenced such as positive couple interaction, communication, and social support (Stanley & Markman, 1997).

As found in the Hawkins et al. (2008) meta-analysis, a handful of RE programs have examined the programmatic effects on stability demonstrating both positive (Bouma, Halford, & Young, 2004; Halford et al., 2004; Stanley et al., 2006) and no effects on program participants (Nicholson et al., 2007; Stanley et al., 2001). Once again, however, this literature is limited in that most RE programs have not demonstrated an ability to improve relationship stability among populations who are at high risk for relationship dissolution (e.g., stepfamilies and ethnically diverse couples; Halford et al., 2001, 2003). Among programs serving at-risk population groups, scholars generally report mixed results in relationship outcomes. In one RE program serving ethnically diverse stepfamily participants, mixed results indicating significant decreases in instability for women at post-program in one study (Higginbotham & Adler-Baeder, 2008) and nonsignificant decreases in instability over time in another (Higginbotham et al., 2010). Similarly, Nicholson et al. (2007) found no significant effects in relationship stability over a 5-

year period among stepfamily participants. Other RE programs targeting Latino participants have also documented increases in relationship stability for individuals at post-assessment (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, Pruett, & Wong, 2009; Halford et al., 2004).

According to published work by Ooms and Wilson (2004), difficulties in relationship stability have been linked to poor economic conditions. In examining RE's ability to assist low-income groups in increasing relationship stability, Hawkins and Fackrell's (2010) meta-analysis demonstrated RE's ability to positively effect relationship stability (d = .250) among other outcome variables. This effect size however must be interpreted with caution in that it is based on only three RE evaluative studies. Although some research demonstrates positive effects on relationship stability among low-income groups, other RE programming has shown no statistical changes in instability scores among low-income couples in stepfamilies at post-assessment (Higginbotham & Skogrand, 2010).

Cost of Relationship Education

Over the past two decades government interest in funding efforts to strengthen couple relationships has heightened. A number of states within the U.S., as well as the federal government, have allocated significant funds to RE efforts (Ooms, 2007). This is further seen on the international level where countries such as Australia have provided significant funding toward RE programming. Although government efforts have increased in allocating funds to RE efforts, contention remains among those who desire further evidence regarding the benefits of RE and the costs associated with program implementation (Halford, 2011; Halford et al., 2008).

Scholars today address criticisms about the government's role in funding RE programming through several tactics. These tactics include published evidence demonstrating the positive impacts of RE on couple relationships, the potential for reducing divorce, and the possible savings of taxpayer dollars (Hawkins et al., 2013; Ooms, 2005; Scafidi, 2008). Extant

literature has provided a wealth of knowledge regarding the positive impacts of healthy couple relationships (e.g., positive health, well-being, and financial stability) as well as the negative impacts of relationship dissolution and single parent households (e.g., psychological adjustment, financial hardship, negative impacts on children; Amato, 2000; Gallagher & Waite, 2000; Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007; Sweeper & Halford, 2006; Thomas & Sawhill, 2002, 2005).

Scholars have further documented the monetary costs of divorce and familial breakup on society. Conservative estimates, as determined from the 2006 Current Population Survey, suggests the U.S. government spends over $112 billion annually as a result of divorce (e.g., Medicaid, TANF, costs on poverty, education, and criminal justice programs). These taxpayer costs include an estimated $70.1 billion at the federal level, $33.3 billion at the state level, and $8.5 billion at the local level (Scafidi, 2008). Furthermore, an estimated $15,000 per divorce in personal costs is experienced by individuals (e.g., lawyer fees and relocation expenses; Schramm, 2006).

To address the fiscal costs of divorce, scholars have noted the potential of RE in reducing divorce and positively impacting family formation. For example, Birch, Weed, and Olsen (2004) in their examination of policies which incorporate premarital education, found effective RE programming reduced the potential of divorce among couples by 2%. Other scholars have found that couples who attend RE report lower levels of divorce proneness and are on average less likely to divorce (Schramm, Marshall, Harris, & George, 2003; Stanley et al., 2006). For example, Stanley et al. concluded that attendance in premarital education was associated with a 31% decrease in the odds of divorce even after controlling for characteristics correlated with divorce and premarital education (e.g., age at marriage, children from marriage, and duration of marriage).

Most recently, Hawkins and colleagues (2013) examined the effects of increased RE funding through the HMI on population-level outcomes taken from the 2000 to 2010 American

Community Survey. Their findings show a small, but positive, statistically significant relationship between HMI funding for RE from 2000 to 2010 and an increased percentage of married adults in the U.S., increased number of children living with two parents, as well as a decreased number of children living with one parent, fewer nonmarital births, and fewer children living in poverty. With scholars demonstrating positive effects of RE on couple relationships and potential population outcomes, the question for scholars and policymakers turns from whether RE can work, to the cost feasibility of such programming.

The estimated cost of implementing RE varies greatly depending on a variety of factors (e.g., approach, curriculum, and format; Halford et al., 2008; Halford, Petch, & Creedy, 2010; Ooms, 2005). According to an internal evaluation of RE in Australia, the average cost per participant was found to range from $9.57 to as high as $1,016 (Young, 1997). Looking more specifically at a research-based, skills-oriented RE program, the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program [PREP], the estimated per participant cost is approximately $633. This figure is based on an assumed five couple participant course, which includes the costs of training facilitators, wages, material costs, venue, and so forth. After the initial training of facilitators, the running cost for the PREP program is estimated to be lower at $282 per participant (Engsheden, Fabian, & Sarkadi, 2013).

With the wide range of programmatic costs of RE, scholars have called for further evaluation to determine the potential cost/benefits of such programs (Halford, 2011; Halford et al., 2008; Hawkins & Ooms, 2010; Ooms & Wilson, 2004). Currently, few programs have conducted cost analysis evaluations and a limited amount of published work exists regarding the cost/benefits of such programming. As stated by Hawkins and Ooms (2012), further examination into the cost-effectiveness of RE programs is needed, primarily with the advertisement that RE programming is low-cost in nature.

Perhaps the most comprehensive examination of the costs/benefits associated with RE was published by the Australian House of Representative Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs in 1998. As part of a call by the Attorney General in 1996 to examine the use of federal funds in the family services sector, the Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs in the House of Representatives published a congressional report describing the history and impact of divorce and marriage in Australia, the role of the government in RE, and recommendations for future RE programming. Among their findings, the committee concluded that the cost of divorce to Australia exceeded $3 billion annually. If every couple in the nation were to attend RE, it would cost the government approximately $14 million, $10 million for only first marriage couples. Based on these estimates, the committee concluded that the potential cost of RE would be modest in comparison to the significant costs felt by society related to relationship dissolution.

In addition to the Australian committee report, scholars have provided suggestions as to the potential savings RE could bring to U.S. taxpayers; however, the majority of published information is based on hypothetical scenarios. For example, using a proposed policy by the Utah legislature, based on current state marriage rates and population size, Hawkins (2007) estimated that by implementing a statewide marriage license discount program, that would be tied to 6 hours of pre-marital RE, the state of Utah would incur a $244,800 cost. Based on estimates suggesting that relationship dissolution costs Utah taxpayers over $10,000 per divorce, Hawkins estimated that the state could potentially save $2 million annually if the divorce rate were to be reduced by 10% statewide (about 125 divorces in 2002). Although a hypothetical example, Hawkins concluded that promoting RE policies would be cost-effective to the state (see article for full description). Other scholars have similarly suggested that the potential benefits of RE may be even greater in other parts of the nation (e.g., California; Howell, 2011). In examining the nation as a whole, Scafidi (2008) suggested that if the U.S. federal marriage programming efforts were shown to be successful, even by 1%, based on research from 2006 ACS data, the potential

savings to the U.S. taxpayer would exceed $1 billion annually. As suggested by Hawkins and Ooms (2012), further examination into cost related issues is needed.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the current study is based on Coie and colleagues (1993) intervention theory. Intervention theory provides a conceptual framework for studying the prevention of human dysfunction. This is done by attempting to counteract potential risk factors, while reinforcing protective factors, which individuals and families face in preventing a targeted dysfunction. In doing so, Coie emphasizes the need for science and practice to play a complementary role. Research should inform intervention programming and vice versa.

In conducting intervention research, Coie and colleagues (1993) identified important themes which contribute to the advancement of the field. Among their themes, the authors provided several themes that are of specific importance to the current study. First, intervention theory emphasizes the need to incorporate longitudinal designs so that research can accurately determine effects of programming over time. Second, individuals are known to adapt to human and environmental interactions. Individuals may vary in response to different environments (e.g., interventions) which in turn, may lead to different outcomes. Programming should strive to find the best fit between persons and environment, being sensitive to individual history and cultural context. Thirdly, prevention research should incorporate the study of both genders, as well as populations that include diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Dysfunctional behavior may be seen differently based on contextual and cultural factors; therefore, interventions may vary in effectiveness based on these factors. Furthermore, Coie et al. (1993) suggested that future research be methodologically rigorous in incorporating more adequate sampling, measurements, and appropriate statistical models so that prevention research can ultimately lead to practical applications.

Based on Coie's framework, the current study will evaluate outcomes from differing *Smart Steps* participant groups who are at risk of experiencing relationship dysfunction. *Smart Steps for Stepfamilies: Embrace the Journey* as described, is a research-based marriage and family life education program which was utilized as the intervention for this study. *Smart Steps*, as shown by Adler-Baeder and Higginbotham (2004), is theoretically based on ecological, systems, family life course, and family strengths theories. As described by ecological theory (White & Klein, 2008), families exist within various ecosystems (i.e., micro and macro), which are interdependent with each another. Following this idea of interdependence, *Smart Steps* provides intervention programming for the entire family, providing parallel sessions for both children and adults. By doing so, a more comprehensive approach to RE and promoting healthy family functioning can be obtained.

Family life course theory focuses on both the family as well as the broader social institution of the family. This is especially important when providing RE services to differing groups of individuals since social norms, expectations, cultures, and values impact family developmental processes. For example, as Cherlin (1978) first suggested, remarried families may be viewed as an "incomplete institution" because of the unclear social norms and expectations experienced by these families. The *Smart Steps* program addresses the unique positions, norms, and roles that remarried couples and stepfamilies face such as ambiguous social norms, unclear couple and family expectations, and few social supports. By doing so, this program assists individuals in stepfamilies through potentially difficult familial transitions.

A final theory used in the development and implementation of the *Smart Steps* program is family strengths theory. As described by DeFrain and Asay (2007), family strengths theory assumes that all families have strengths and programming should focus on these strengths rather than the negative aspects of relationships. Among stepfamily participants in the *Smart Steps* program this includes focusing on the positive aspects of the current relationship, the skills

participants can learn to improve these relationships, and remaining optimistic in the success of their stepfamily.

Further theory and empirical work is incorporated in specific *Smart* Steps lessons. For example, John Gottman's couple strengthening research (Gottman & Silver, 1999) integrates concepts of healthy relationship communication, problem solving, and conflict resolution. Overall, the *Smart Steps* program focuses on theoretically and research-based strengths and skills-building approaches, emphasizing positive stepfamily functioning.

Study Objectives and Research Questions

In light of the extant literature regarding RE programs and the interest of policymakers in demonstrating the effectiveness of such programs, the main objective of the current study is to examine the changes experienced by adult participants who enrolled in the *Smart Steps for Stepfamilies: Embrace the Journey* RE program and to determine the costs associated with implementation. This study is exploratory in nature, meaning that insufficient longitudinal, multilevel information regarding these targeted groups attending this intervention exists; therefore, this study will provide new ground for other researchers to build upon.

Specific objectives for this study include:

1. To evaluate *Smart Steps* outcomes for stepfamily adult participants over time.
    a. To compare *Smart Steps* outcomes of first married, remarried, and higher order marriage participants.
    b. To compare *Smart Steps* outcomes of European American and Latino participants.
    c. To compare *Smart Steps* outcomes of low- and middle-income participants.
    d. To compare *Smart Steps* outcomes of male and female participants.

2. To determine the cost per participant and cost per course of implementing the *Smart Steps* program.

The research questions for this study include:

1. How do relationship outcomes (relationship quality, commitment, and instability) of *Smart Steps* participants change from pre-program to one year post-program?

2. How do relationship outcomes (relationship quality, commitment, and instability) of *Smart Step* participants differ based on number of marriages, ethnicity, income, and gender?

3. What is the cost of implementing the *Smart Steps* program?

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The current study includes data from two federally funded Healthy Marriage Demonstration grants awarded to Utah State University (USU). The grants were funded by the Office of Family Assistance (Grant No. 90FE0129; "Teaching Healthy Marriage Skills to Ethnically Diverse, Low-Income Couples in Stepfamilies") and the Office of Head Start (Grant No. 90YD0227; "Teaching Healthy Marriage Skills to Low-Income, Hispanic Couple in Stepfamilies"). The primary goal of these grant programs was to develop, provide, and evaluate relationship education programming to low-income and ethnically diverse stepfamilies (Stepfamily Education, 2012). *Smart Steps: Embrace the Journey* (*Smart Steps*; Adler-Baeder, 2007), a research-based marriage and family life education program, was the curriculum used in both grant programs.

Program Description and Procedures

Smart Steps, a 12-hour, six module curriculum, focuses on the complexities and interdependent nature of stepfamily relationships (Higginbotham & Adler-Baeder, 2010). Families who were part of a stepfamily, that is one or more children in the family came from a previous relationship, were recruited into the program. Twelve family-service agencies across the state of Utah implemented the Smart Steps program. Recruitment efforts were implemented on a local level by service agencies (e.g., personally inviting known stepfamilies into the program, and sending newsletters and emails to current clientele) as well as state-wide advertising by program administrators (e.g., billboards and newspaper advertising). Stepfamilies were recruited into the program most commonly through personal invitation by the facilitator agency, mass media advertising (e.g., billboard, flyers, and newspaper), and family or friend referral (see Skogrand, Reck et al., 2010 for a full description of program recruitment and retention efforts).

Enrolled adults (ages 18 years and older), and children (ages 6 to 17), were separated into concurrent classrooms for the first hour and a half of each of the six class sessions in which age appropriate stepfamily content was instructed. For the final half hour of each class, adults and children were brought together to participate in a family strengthening activity. Families with children under the age of five were provided onsite daycare during the class time. Course content focused on healthy couple and family relationship strengths while addressing common challenges faced by couples in stepfamilies including conflict management, stepparenting and co-parenting strategies, and financial management.

In partnership with USU, 12 family-service agencies were contracted to provide the *Smart Steps* courses in various locations throughout Utah. Contracted agencies were expected to provide *Smart Steps* to at least seven couples per course, retaining couples for at least four of the six classes during the course. Contracted agencies were furthermore required to implement regular evaluation procedures including the administration of participant surveys and keeping attendance records. Between February 2007 and September 2011, 159 *Smart Steps* courses (114 Office of Family Assistance grant and 45 Office of Head Start) were offered under the two federal grants. During this time, 3,186 adults and 2,615 youth (ages 6 to 17 years) attended at least one *Smart Steps* class.

Data was collected at five points over the course of a year (see Appendices B, C, D, E, and F for complete surveys). The first of these points was the pre-program survey, provided to all adult participants before attending their first *Smart Steps* class (T1). Best practices in survey methodology were implemented as suggested by Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009). As suggested, survey protocols were developed to ensure participant data remained confidential from other participants and facilitators in order to maintain trust and accuracy of information. Facilitators instructed program participants to complete paper surveys independently and seal completed surveys in an unidentifiable envelope before handing it to the classroom facilitator.

Facilitators then mailed all sealed pre-surveys to USU for data entry. Similar procedures were used at the end of final session of the *Smart Steps* course when post-program surveys were complete (T2).

Approximately 6 weeks after completing the *Smart Steps* course, participants were brought back together for a booster class (see Vaterlaus, 2009). At the completion of the booster class, using the same survey protocols as the pre- and post-survey, adults completed the first follow-up survey (T3). Two additional follow-up surveys were completed via mail at six months (T4) and one year (T5) post-program completion. Two-year data were also collected as part of this project; however for attrition purposes this data was not used in the current study (see Appendix G). Best practices in mailings as described by Dillman et al. (2009) were followed to facilitate the highest retention rate possible. This process included sending a letter from the principal investigator explaining the importance of the survey, thanking the participant, including postage-paid envelopes for returning completed surveys, and a small $2 cash incentive.

Returned surveys were processed by project staff at Utah State University. If surveys were returned as undeliverable (e.g., participant moved without a forwarding address) project staff referred to the pre-survey where participants were asked to provide contact information for themselves as well as a close friend or relative. When contact information was provided, project staff contacted the participant, friend, or family member in order to obtain an accurate address for post-survey mailings. Overseen by the principal investigator and project manager, returned surveys were coded into an Access file, and data entered into SPSS. After data entry project staff reviewed and verified returned surveys in order to ensure data accuracy within SPSS and to check for human error.

Participant Characteristics

Participants for this study include adult participants who attended the *Smart Steps* program as part of two federally funded projects from February 2007 to September 2011. In total, 3,186 adults and 2,448 children participated. The sample for the current study includes adult participants who completed at least one survey during the program period (2,828 adult participants). Therefore, adults who attended the program but did not return any surveys will not be included in the analysis. Table 1 provides a summary of the number of adults who completed each assessment and the respective response rates for each survey.

A sample of 1,316 men (46.5%) and 1,512 women (53.5%) participated in the current study (N = 2,828). The majority of these participants identified as being in a relationship (1,283 couples). In general, participants were in their 30's, had at least a high school education (12 years), and had approximately two children living in the household (see Table 2). A majority of participants were in their first or second marriage (see Table 3) and on average were married for nearly four years (see Table 2). Among participants in an unmarried relationship, on average, couples had been together two to three years. Most participants reported being European American or of Latino descent (see Table 4), and made less than $50,000 annually (see Table 5).

Because involvement in the program evaluation was voluntary, participants could refuse completing evaluation surveys or drop out of the program at any time. In order to determine if this attrition was random, binary logistic regression was conducted using age, race, marital status, and number of marriages as predictors of participant retention (i.e., participant returned the most recent survey available to them indicating they had not dropped-out of the program). Findings demonstrated a statistically significant relationship only between gender, marital status, and attrition. This means that women (b = .348; p = .008) as well as married participants (b = -.351; p = .015) were more likely to remain in the program.

Table 1

Participant Survey Completion

Surveys	Number of participants who received surveys	Number of participants who completed surveys	Response rate
Pre-survey	3,186	2,798	87.82%
Post-survey	2,211	2,064	93.35%
Booster session	1,190	1,079	90.67%
6 month follow-up	2,325	618	26.58%
1 year follow-up	1,870	440	23.53%

Table 2

Descriptive Variables of Participants

	Men		Women	
Variables	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*
Age	35.02	8.195	32.67	7.542
Months married	42.22	50.374	46.75	56.650
Months together cohabitating	25.58	31.517	29.16	36.000
Years of education	12.97	2.821	12.98	2.773
Residential children	2.28	1.603	2.85	1.580
Nonresidential children	1.10	1.593	.75	1.426

Table 3

Marital Status of Participants

	Men		Women	
Marital status	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Marital status				
Married	794	60.6	874	58.0
Unmarried relationship	454	34.6	523	34.7
Single	53	4.0	100	6.6
Times married				
Never married	173	14.4	175	11.6
1	470	39.1	540	35.8
2	459	38.2	559	37.1
3 or more	99	8.2	125	15.5

Table 4

Ethnic Background of Participants

	Men		Women	
Ethnicity	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
European American	877	68.2	997	66.1
Hispanic/Latino	339	26.4	420	27.9
African American	11	.9	7	.5
Native American	9	.7	18	1.2
Asian American	7	.5	10	.7
Bi-Racial	15	1.2	12	.8
Other	24	1.9	19	1.3
Unknown	2	.2	3	.2

Table 5

Total Annual Income of Participants

	Men		Women	
Income level	*N*	%	*N*	%
Less than $25,000	525	29.4	1007	75.1
$25,001 to $50,000	461	37.8	262	17.4
$50,001 to $100,000	204	15.5	59	3.9
More than $100,000	27	2.1	12	.8

Measures

Outcome Variables

Three measures were used as reported outcomes for this study, namely relationship quality, couple commitment, and instability. Relationship quality was assessed using the averaged total score of a five-item scale developed by Norton (1983). On a 7-point Likert scale, participant responses ranged from "Very strongly disagree" to "Very strongly agree" in answer to five statements: (1) We have a good relationship; (2) My relationship with my partner is very stable; (3) Our relationship is strong; (4) My relationship with my partner makes me happy; and (5) I really feel like part of a team with my partner. Internal consistency reliability of the five items was determined using Cronbach's alpha for each of the survey periods: pre = .96, post = .97, booster = .97, 6 month = .98, and 1 year = .98.

Couple commitment was comprised of four items originally developed by Stanley and Markman (1992). Using a 5-point Likert scale, participant responses ranged from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree" in answer to four statements: (1) My relationship with my partner/spouse is more important to me than almost anything else in my life; (2) I may not want to be with my partner/spouse a few years from now [reversed coded]; (3) I like to think of my

partner/spouse and me more in terms of “us” and “we” than “me” and “him/her”; and (4) I want this relationship to stay strong no matter what rough times we may encounter. Reliability of the four items was determined using Cronbach’s alpha for each of the survey periods: pre = .76, post = .71, booster = .68, 6 month = .82, and 1 year = .77.

Relationship instability was assessed using the averaged total score of a four-item scale developed by Booth, Johnson, and Edwards (1983). On a 5-point Likert scale, participant responses ranged from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree” in answer to four questions: (1) Have you ever thought your relationship might be in trouble? (2) Has the thought of getting a divorce or separation crossed your mind? (3) Have you discussed divorce or separation with a close friend? and (4) Have you or your partner/spouse ever seriously suggested the idea of divorce or separation? Reliability of the four items was determined using Cronbach’s alpha for each of the survey periods: pre = .88, post = .88, booster = .88, 6 month = .89, and 1 year = .89.

Time

In order to examine the longitudinal effects of the outcome variables, time was measured based on the structured programmatic layout of the *Smart Steps* course and participant survey schedule. Pre-program surveys were completed at the beginning of the first class; six weeks later, the post-program survey was completed at the end of the last class, followed by a booster session survey completed approximately six weeks later. Six-months and one year after the completion of the final *Smart Steps* class, additional follow-up surveys were mailed to participants. In order to most accurately portray the elapsed time between these data collection points, specific time values were created using the post-survey as a baseline. Based on the described survey timeline, for each survey completed participants were specified a subsequent time value represented by fractions of a year labeled as pre-survey = -.12; post-survey = 0; booster-survey = .12; sixmonth survey = .5; and one-year survey = 1.

As shown by previous RE literature, it is not uncommon for program participants to report varying changes in outcome variables over time. Based on this knowledge, three separate time variables were included in the analysis of this study namely linear (time), quadratic ($time^2$), and cubic time ($time^3$). These time variables allowed for the examination of the linear, curvilinear, and a third possible fluctuation (either negative or positive) in outcome variables.

Individual and Couple Characteristics

In addition to the outcome and time measures of this study, key individual and couple demographic characteristics were gathered at the pre-survey assessment. Individual demographic questions included age, gender, number of marriages, ethnicity, education, and personal earnings. Number of marriages was dummy coded into three variables for the analysis to distinguish groups among categorical variables, resulting in four subsequent variables: never married, second marriage, and higher order marriage (3+ marriages) groups with first marriage used as the reference group. The ethnicity variable was similarly dummy coded into Latino, and "other" ethnicity variables. European American was set as the reference group. A final individual characteristic variable, number of surveys completed, was created summing the total number of surveys completed by each individual.

Couple characteristic demographic questions, collected at the pre-survey, included two key variables, marital status and household income. Marital status specified whether an individual was reportedly in a married or an unmarried relationship (i.e., cohabitating). Single, non-cohabitating individuals were removed from the study. This variable was dummy coded with those in a married relationship being the reference group. Based on the personal earnings information gained from each individual on the pre-survey, a household income variable was created summing individual personal earnings of identified couples. Coding ranged from 1 to 52, starting with "Less than $10,000" and subsequently increasing to a maximum of "$150,000 to $200,000."

HLM Analysis

The first research question of this study is to determine how relationship outcomes (i.e., relationship quality, couple commitment, and relationship instability) of *Smart Step* participants change over time. The second is to determine how these relationship outcomes differ based on individual and couple demographic characteristics. To test these research questions this study utilizes a hierarchical linear model analysis allowing for the longitudinal examination of outcome variables as they are nested within individual and couple characteristics. Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM), also known as multilinear or multilevel modeling, is a statistical analysis in which data are hierarchically structured; meaning, first level units are nested within second-level and third-level units (e.g., students nested within classrooms, and classrooms nested within schools). By conducting this type of analysis, researchers can determine how different layers of data interact and impact dependent variables (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

It is the goal of HLM to account for the variance in the dependent variable at the lowest level, while considering information from all other levels (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002; Steenbergen & Jones, 2002). HLM was chosen as the most appropriate analysis for this study because this data violates several assumptions required for other types of analysis (e.g., Repeated Measures ANOVA). Specifically, observations and errors within the current study are not independent of one another (i.e., the same individual has multiple data points over time). Furthermore, HLM provides the flexibility needed to accommodate unequal spacing between data points and missing or unequal data (see Table 1; Hox, 1995; Kwok, West, & Green, 2007; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

The current study will utilize a three-level, multimodel HLM approach. The first model consists of a full model which regresses the outcome variable on the independent variables. The second model is a simplified version of the first, omitting all statistically nonsignificant variables ($p < .05$) to determine a better fitting model for predicting participant outcomes. This process

was repeated, if necessary, until a best fitting model was determined; that is, all included variables within the model were statistically significant in predicting the dependent variable. In cases where no statistical significance was found over time in the full model, no further modeling was performed.

Three levels of analysis were used in the study. The first measured the linear, quadratic, and cubic change in outcome variable scores over time. Level-1 variables were group-mean centered in the analysis to improve the interpretation and variance of the intercept as well as improve potential bias of coefficients (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). The following equation shows the level-1 model for time:

$$\text{Outcome Variable}_{tij} = \pi_{0ij}*(\text{Time}) + \pi_{2ij}*(\text{Time}^2) + \pi_{3ij}*(\text{Time}^3) + e_{tij}$$

The second level includes nesting time variables within individual characteristics to determine any moderating effects on outcome variables. The level-2, individual characteristic variables, consisted of variables unique to each participant, including age, gender, number of marriages, ethnicity, education, personal earnings, and number of surveys completed. Level-2 variables were group-mean centered in the analysis. The following provides the full level-2 model equations:

$$\pi_{0ij} = \beta_{00j} + \beta_{00j}*(\text{age}_{ij}) + \beta_{02j}*(\text{gender}_{ij}) + \beta_{03j}*(\text{never married}_{ij}) + \beta_{04j}*(\text{second marriage}_{ij}) + \beta_{05j}*(\text{higher order marriage}_{ij}) + \beta_{06j}*(\text{Latino}_{ij}) + \beta_{07j}*(\text{other ethnicity}_{ij}) + \beta_{08j}*(\text{education}_{ij}) + \beta_{09j}*(\text{your earnings}_{ij}) + \beta_{010j}*(\text{surveys completed}_{ij}) + r_{0ij}$$

$$\pi 1_{ij} = \beta_{00j} + \beta_{11j}*(\text{age}_{ij}) + \beta_{12j}*(\text{gender}_{ij}) + \beta_{13j}*(\text{never married}_{ij}) + \beta_{14j}*(\text{second marriage}_{ij}) + \beta_{15j}*(\text{higher order marriage}_{ij}) + \beta_{16j}*(\text{Latino}_{ij}) + \beta_{17j}*(\text{other ethnicity}_{ij}) + \beta_{18j}*(\text{education}_{ij}) + \beta_{19j}*(\text{your earnings}_{ij}) + \beta_{110j}*(\text{surveys completed}_{ij}) + r_{1ij}$$

$$\pi 2_{ij} = \beta_{20j} + \beta_{21j}*(\text{age}_{ij}) + \beta_{22j}*(\text{gender}_{ij}) + \beta_{23j}*(\text{never married}_{ij}) + \beta_{24j}*(\text{second marriage}_{ij}) + \beta_{25j}*(\text{higher order marriage}_{ij}) + \beta_{26j}*(\text{Latino}_{ij}) + \beta_{27j}*(\text{other ethnicity}_{ij}) + \beta_{28j}*(\text{education}_{ij}) + \beta_{29j}*(\text{your earnings}_{ij}) + \beta_{210j}*(\text{surveys completed}_{ij})$$

$$\pi 3_{ij} = \beta_{30j} + \beta_{31j}*(\text{age}_{ij}) + \beta_{32j}*(\text{gender}_{ij}) + \beta_{33j}*(\text{never married}_{ij}) + \beta_{34j}*(\text{second marriage}_{ij}) + \beta_{35j}*(\text{higher order marriage}_{ij}) + \beta_{36j}*(\text{Latino}_{ij}) + \beta_{37j}*(\text{other ethnicity}_{ij}) + \beta_{38j}*(\text{education}_{ij}) + \beta_{39j}*(\text{your earnings}_{ij}) + \beta_{310j}*(\text{surveys completed}_{ij})$$

On the final level of analysis, time individual characteristics were nested within couple characteristics to further determine any moderating effects on outcome variables. These level-3 variables included two identified characteristics unique to each couple, namely marital status and household income. The third level equations for this model are as follows:

$$\beta_{00j} = \gamma_{000} + \gamma_{001}(\text{marital status}_j) + \gamma_{002}(\text{household income}_j) + u_{00j}$$

$$\beta_{010j} = \gamma_{0100} + \gamma_{0101}(\text{marital status}_j) + \gamma_{0102}(\text{household income}_j)$$

$$\beta_{20j} = \gamma_{200} + \gamma_{201}(\text{marital status}_j) + \gamma_{202}(\text{household income}_j)$$

$$\beta_{30j} = \gamma_{300} + \gamma_{301}(\text{marital status}_j) + \gamma_{302}(\text{household income}_j)$$

CPU Analysis

The final research question of this study includes a cost analysis of the implemented *Smart Steps* program from which the quantitative data derives. As described by Kee (1999), a cost analysis incorporates a process by which programs are assessed as to the relative cost of project objectives. By conducting this type of analysis, programmatic costs can be compared to program outcomes/objectives as well as to inform whether the cost of program implementation is justifiable compared to alternative uses of funds.

The cost analysis for this study incorporates procedures as described by Levin and McEwan (2001) in which an ingredient methodology is used to compile and determine the cost of implementing the *Smart Steps* program. The ingredient method asserts that "every intervention uses ingredients that have a value or cost" (i.e., cost of staff, travel, and materials; p. 47). Data for this process is taken from yearly financial reports provided by the principal investigator of the two federally funded grants: "Teaching Healthy Marriage Skills to Ethnically Diverse, Low-

Income Couples in Stepfamilies" (Grant No. 90FE0129) and "Teaching Healthy Marriage Skills to Low-Income, Hispanic Couple in Stepfamilies" (Grant No. 90YD0227). The "ingredients" for this study include the yearly number of adults and youth (ages 6-17 years) served by each federal grant as well as the yearly number of *Smart Steps* classes implemented (e.g., six classes and one booster session per *Smart Steps* course). A yearly programmatic cost for each federal grant was also reported. This cost information was used in conjunction with the combined adults and youth served data to determine an individual cost per unit (CPU) estimate (e.g., cost of grant/number of total participants). The same calculation was conducted to determine a CPU for the number of classes implemented.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The results of this study are provided in a three level, hierarchical linear design examining three outcome variables: relationship quality, couple commitment, and relationship instability. Each outcome variable is examined independently, using the multilevel HLM approach as described above.

Relationship Quality

Table 6 presents the mean raw scores of relationship quality for each data collection point. The *n* in Table 6 represents each relationship quality data point within the analysis. Unlike other types of analysis, HLM accounts for each data point as a separate *n*. Therefore, the *N* in Table 6 indicates that 5,713 relationship quality data points were included in the analysis. As depicted in Figure 1, raw mean scores show an increase in relationship quality from pre- to booster survey time points (mean change = .44). A decline in relationship quality is then observed from booster- to one-year post-program survey (mean change = -.15).

Table 6

Relationship Quality Raw Mean Scores

Surveys	*N*	Mean	*SD*
Pre	5713	5.64	1.29
Post	4672	5.89	1.18
Booster	3220	6.05	1.11
6 month	1967	5.87	1.22
1 year	1014	5.90	1.24

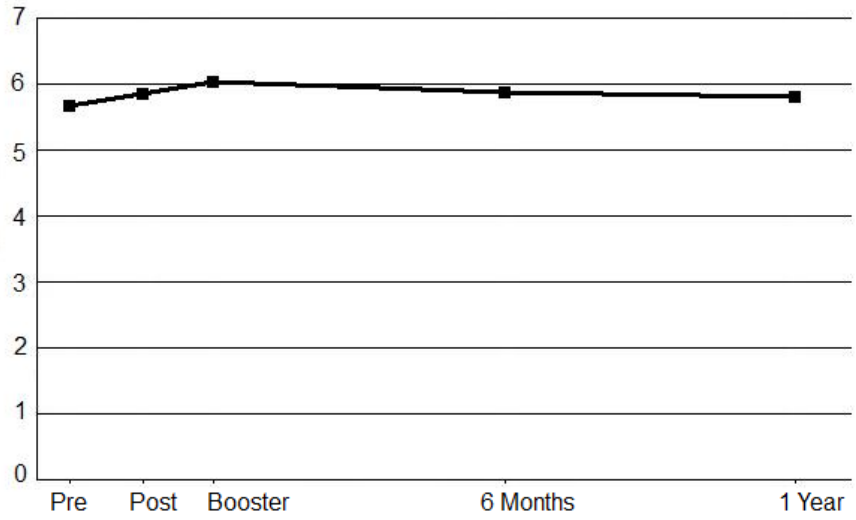

Figure 1. Relationship quality: Raw mean scores.

Full Model

The full model for relationship quality shows a similar curvilinear trend over time among *Smart Steps* participants. As shown by Figure 2, predicted levels of relationship quality increased during the program, peaked at the booster session, followed by a subsequent downward trend in scores. The increased change from pre-session to booster represents a quarter of a point change in standard deviation. Table 7 provides the predicted HLM output for the full model of relationship quality. The intercept and linear slope was set as random for this model, allowing for variance among time and individuals. By allowing for random variance among individuals a more accurate model is obtained.

In the full model, linear, quadratic, and cubic time slopes were found to be statistically significant. Thus, participants were predicted to experience significant increases from pre- to booster surveys (linear slope change, $b = .86$, $p \leq .001$) and then decline in scores over time (quadratic slope change, $b = -4.67$, $p \leq .001$). The predicted intercept (post-program) coefficient for participant's relationship quality was 5.57 ($p \leq .001$; Figure 2 shows an intercept below 5.57 due to the group mean centering). The only statistically significant level-2 variable in the full

model was gender (b = -.12, p < .05) meaning men were predicted, on average, to have a .12 higher score in relationship quality than women at the intercept. Among level-3 variables, only household income was found to significantly predict change in the intercept of relationship quality (b = .01, $p \leq .001$).

Household income was the only level-3 variable within the linear slope to be statistically significant (B = -.02, $p \leq .001$). Within the linear slope change in time, household income was predicted to affect the outcome variable; meaning, participants experienced a -.02 change in average relationship quality scores, with each increased level of household income, over time. Therefore, persons with lower levels of household income were predicted to have steeper increases in relationship quality over time compared to those at higher household income levels. To achieve a best fitting model, all statistically nonsignificant predictors were removed from the full model. Table 8 presents the results of the second model for relationship quality.

This second model is similar to the full model. The predicted intercept for participants relationship quality was 5.57 ($p \leq .001$), level-2 gender variable (b = -.10, $p \leq .001$), and household income (b = .01, $p \leq .001$) variables at the intercept were statistically significant. A noted difference between the second model and full model is the statistical insignificance of household income at the linear slope (b = -.01, p = .164). Linear time (b = .42, $p \leq .001$), quadratic time (b = -3.83, $p \leq .001$), and cubic time (b = 3.42, $p \leq .001$) remained statistically significant.

Best Fitting Model

The best fitting model consists of only those variables found to significantly predict relationship quality over time. Based on the results from the second model, a third model was created; removing the statistically nonsignificant household income variable from the linear slope equation. Table 9 provides the results of this third and best fitting model. This model has statistically significant intercept (b = 5.56, $p \leq .001$) and time variables (linear slope: b = .32, $p \leq$

Table 7

Relationship Quality: Full Model

Fixed effects	*b*	*SE*	*t-ratio*	*df*
Intercept (π_0)	5.57**	.06	94.71	1187
Marital status (γ_{001})	-.02	.07	-.28	1187
Household income (γ_{002})	.007**	.00	3.22	1187
Age (γ_{010})	-.004	.01	-.71	764
Gender (γ_{020})	-.12*	.04	-2.65	764
Never married (γ_{030})	.07	.09	.84	764
Second marriage(γ_{040})	.03	.06	.53	764
Higher order marriage (γ_{050})	.07	.10	.69	764
Latino (γ_{060})	.15	.11	1.32	764
Other race (γ_{070})	.03	.13	.26	764
Education (γ_{080})	-.004	.01	-.33	764
Personal earnings (γ_{090})	-.01	.01	-.54	764
Surveys completed (γ_{0100})	-.05	.04	-1.19	764
Linear slope (π_1)	.86**	.16	5.41	764
Marital status (γ_{101})	-.24	.18	-1.30	764
Household income (γ_{102})	-.02**	.01	-3.69	764
Age (γ_{110})	.03	.03	.75	764
Gender (γ_{120})	.38	.26	1.44	764
Never married (γ_{130})	.13	.55	.23	764
Second marriage(γ_{140})	.33	.30	1.08	764
Higher order marriage (γ_{150})	-.19	.56	-.35	764
Latino (γ_{160})	.82	.70	1.18	764
Other race (γ_{170})	.07	.79	.09	764

(table continues)

Education (γ_{180})	-.08	.07	-1.16	764
Personal earnings (γ_{190})	.07	.05	1.30	764
Surveys completed (γ_{1100})	-.42	.22	-1.92	764
Quadratic slope (π_2)	-4.67**	.74	-6.33	3657
Marital status (γ_{201})	.88	.84	1.05	3657
Household income (γ_{202})	.04	.03	1.42	3657
Age (γ_{210})	.08	.16	.49	3657
Gender (γ_{220})	.10	1.20	.08	3657
Never married (γ_{230})	1.94	2.42	.80	3657
Second marriage(γ_{240})	.58	1.47	.40	3657
Higher order marriage (γ_{250})	-2.60	2.60	-1.00	3657
Latino (γ_{260})	-1.51	3.05	-.50	3657
Other race (γ_{270})	-3.96	3.65	-1.08	3657
Education (γ_{280})	-.27	.32	-.86	3657
Personal earnings (γ_{290})	.42	.24	1.73	3657
Surveys completed (γ_{2100})	.47	1.08	.43	3657
Cubic slope (π_3)	3.43**	.81	4.23	3657
Marital status (γ_{301})	-.46	.93	-.50	3657
Household income (γ_{302})	-.01	.03	-.32	3657
Age (γ_{310})	-.13	.17	-.79	3657
Gender (γ_{320})	-.54	1.33	-.41	3657
Never married (γ_{330})	-1.78	2.77	-.64	3657
Second marriage(γ_{340})	-.68	1.53	-.44	3657
Higher order marriage (γ_{350})	2.74	2.79	.98	3657
Latino (γ_{360})	.97	3.35	.29	3657

(table continues)

Other race (γ_{370})	5.11	3.99	1.28	3657
Education (γ_{380})	.40	.34	1.16	3657
Personal earnings (γ_{390})	-.48	.26	-1.85	3657
Surveys completed (γ_{3100})	.001	1.13	.001	3657

*$p < .05$ **$p \leq .001$

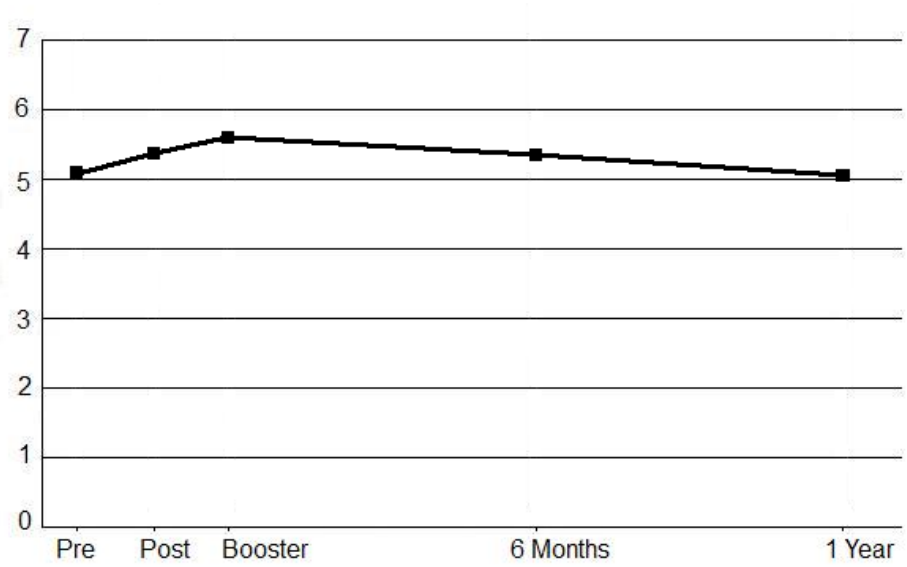

Figure 2. Relationship quality: Full model level-1change over time.

Table 8

Relationship Quality: Second Model

Fixed effects	*b*	*SE*	*t-ratio*	*df*
Intercept (π_0)	5.57**	.05	108.12	1188
Household income (γ_{001})	.01**	.002	3.28	1188
Gender (γ_{010})	-.10**	.03	-3.21	784
Linear slope (π_1)	.42**	.11	3.77	784
Household income (γ_{100})	-.01	.003	-1.39	784
Quadratic slope (π_2)	-3.83**	.39	-9.81	3681
Cubic slope (π_3)	3.42**	.42	8.08	3681

*$p < .05$ **$p \leq .001$

.001; quadratic slope: b = -3.87, $p \leq .001$; and cubic slope: b = 3.44, $p \leq .001$) with only the intercept having statistically significant level-2 and level-3 predictors (i.e., gender and household income). Figure 3 presents the graphed best fitting model using all statistically significant predictors.

Gender had statistically significant differences at the intercept for relationship quality (b = -.10, $p \leq .001$). Men reported higher levels of relationship quality. Household income was statistically significant at the intercept in the best fitting model (b = .01, $p \leq .001$). This means that with each level increase in household income, predicted participant relationship quality scores were predicted to increase by .01 at the intercept. The standard deviance effect size between those who made less than $20,000 and those who made more than $100,000 was .27.

Table 9

Relationship Quality: Best Fitting Model

Fixed effects	*b*	*SE*	*t-ratio*	*df*
Intercept (π_0)	5.56**	.05	108.13	1188
Household income (γ_{001})	.01**	.002	3.32	1188
Gender (γ_{010})	-.10**	.03	-3.21	785
Linear slope (π_1)	.32**	.08	3.80	785
Quadratic slope (π_2)	-3.87**	.39	-9.94	3681
Cubic slope (π_3)	3.44**	.42	8.15	3681

*$p < .05$ **$p \leq .001$

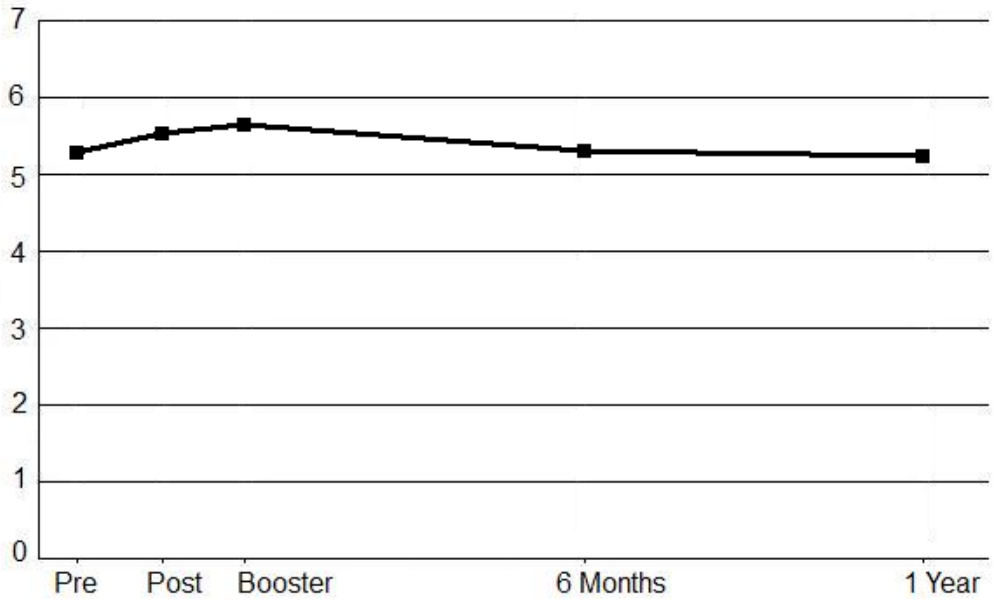

Figure 3. Relationship quality: Best fitting model including all predictors.

Couple Commitment

Table 10 presents the mean raw scores of couple commitment over time. Figure 4 provides a graph form of this data. Mean raw scores depict an increase in couple commitment over time, but only slightly. From the pre- to booster survey, a .08 increase is shown with a following decline of .01 at the 6-month follow-up. A .01 increase in scores is then viewed at oneyear post-survey.

Couple commitment among *Smart Steps* participants increased slightly over time (see Table 10, mean scores); however, as depicted in Table 11, these changes were not statistically significant. Based on the lack of statistically significant time effects in the full model, further examination of this variable are unnecessary.

Table 10

Couple Commitment Raw Mean Scores

Surveys	*N*	Mean	*SD*
Pre	6483	4.40	.67
Post	5336	4.44	.64
Booster	3488	4.48	.61
6 month	2093	4.47	.67
1 year	1794	4.48	.60

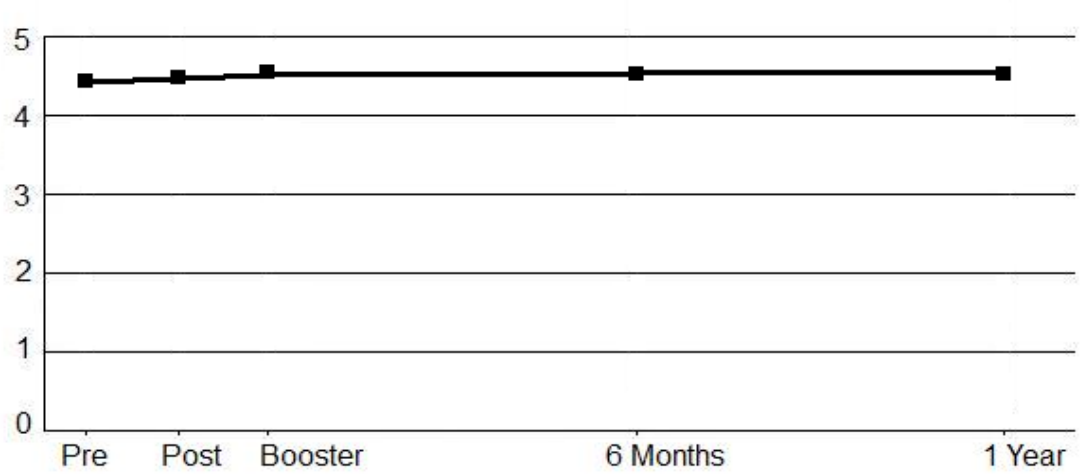

Figure 4. Couple commitment: Raw mean scores.

Table 11

Couple Commitment: Full Model

Fixed effects	*b*	*SE*	*t-ratio*	*df*
Intercept (π_0)	4.38**	.03	163.33	1308
Marital status (γ_{001})	-.15**	.03	-5.01	1308
Household income (γ_{002})	.01**	.001	5.52	1308
Age (γ_{010})	-.004	.004	-1.05	841
Gender (γ_{020})	-.03	.03	-1.03	841
Never married (γ_{030})	.06	.05	1.21	841

(table continues)

Second marriage(γ_{040})	.03	.03	.86	841
Higher order marriage (γ_{050})	.02	.06	.28	841
Latino (γ_{060})	.01	.07	.09	841
Other race (γ_{070})	-.09	.08	-1.18	841
Education (γ_{080})	.003	.01	.43	841
Personal earnings (γ_{090})	-.002	.01	-.28	841
Surveys completed (γ_{0100})	-.05	.03	-1.73	841
Linear slope (π_1)	.14	.09	1.57	841
Marital status (γ_{101})	-.12	.10	-1.18	841
Household income (γ_{102})	-.00	.003	-1.36	841
Age (γ_{110})	.00	.02	.05	841
Gender (γ_{120})	-.02	.15	-.15	841
Never married (γ_{130})	-.36	.30	-1.21	841
Second marriage(γ_{140})	.21	.17	1.23	841
Higher order marriage (γ_{150})	-.16	.31	-.51	841
Latino (γ_{160})	.14	.37	.37	841
Other race (γ_{170})	-.56	.42	-1.34	841
Education (γ_{180})	-.02	.04	-.47	841
Personal earnings (γ_{190})	.02	.03	.69	841
Surveys completed (γ_{1100})	.12	.13	.96	841
Quadratic slope (π_2)	-.63	.43	-1.47	4054
Marital status (γ_{201})	-.16	.79	-.33	4054
Household income (γ_{202})	-.01	.02	-.32	4054
Age (γ_{210})	-.02	.09	-.18	4054
Gender (γ_{220})	-1.17	.70	-1.66	4054

(table continues)

Never married (γ_{230})	.52	1.43	.37	4054
Second marriage(γ_{240})	-.93	.86	-1.09	4054
Higher order marriage (γ_{250})	-1.77	1.47	-1.20	4054
Latino (γ_{260})	.20	1.76	.11	4054
Other race (γ_{270})	-1.13	2.11	-.54	4054
Education (γ_{280})	.05	.19	.24	4054
Personal earnings (γ_{290})	-.02	.14	-.14	4054
Surveys completed (γ_{2100})	.02	.65	.03	4054
Cubic slope (π_3)	.34	.45	.76	4054
Marital status (γ_{301})	.51	.53	.97	4054
Household income (γ_{302})	.01	.02	.71	4054
Age (γ_{310})	.00	.09	.03	4054
Gender (γ_{320})	1.26	.74	1.70	4054
Never married (γ_{330})	-.05	1.55	-.04	4054
Second marriage(γ_{340})	.79	.86	.92	4054
Higher order marriage (γ_{350})	1.77	1.53	1.16	4054
Latino (γ_{360})	-.25	1.83	-.14	4054
Other race (γ_{370})	2.22	2.21	1.01	4054
Education (γ_{380})	.03	.19	.16	4054
Personal earnings (γ_{390})	-.00	.14	-.01	4054
Surveys completed (γ_{3100})	-.31	.65	-.48	4054

*$p < .05$ **$p \leq .001$

Relationship Instability

Table 12 presents the mean raw scores for relationship instability. This data is presented in graph form in Figure 5. The raw mean scores depict a slight decrease in relationship instability

over time (mean change = .10). The seeming greatest improvement in stability are between the post- and booster surveys (mean change = .06).

Similar to the raw mean score data, relationship instability in the full model showed a predicted decrease in scores over time (see Table 13). Level-1 relationship instability time variables showed statistically significant changes at the intercept (b = 1.76; $p \leq .001$) and linear slope (b = -.20; p = .005). Quadratic and cubic changes in time were statistically nonsignificant. This means, over time, average relationship instability scores were predicted to decrease by .20 (p = .005).

Among level-2 variables for the intercept, gender, education, and number of surveys completed were statistically significant at the intercept. No level-2 individual characteristic variables for the linear slope were statistically significant. Among level-3 couple characteristics, marital status was statistically significant ($p \leq .001$). Level-1 quadratic and cubic slope variables were nonsignificant and therefore all level-2 and 3 variables were irrelevant.

Table 12

Relationship Instability Raw Mean Scores

Surveys	*N*	Mean	*SD*
Pre	6471	1.67	.63
Post	5325	1.66	.59
Booster	3472	1.60	.58
6 month	2090	1.58	.59
1 year	1791	1.57	.60

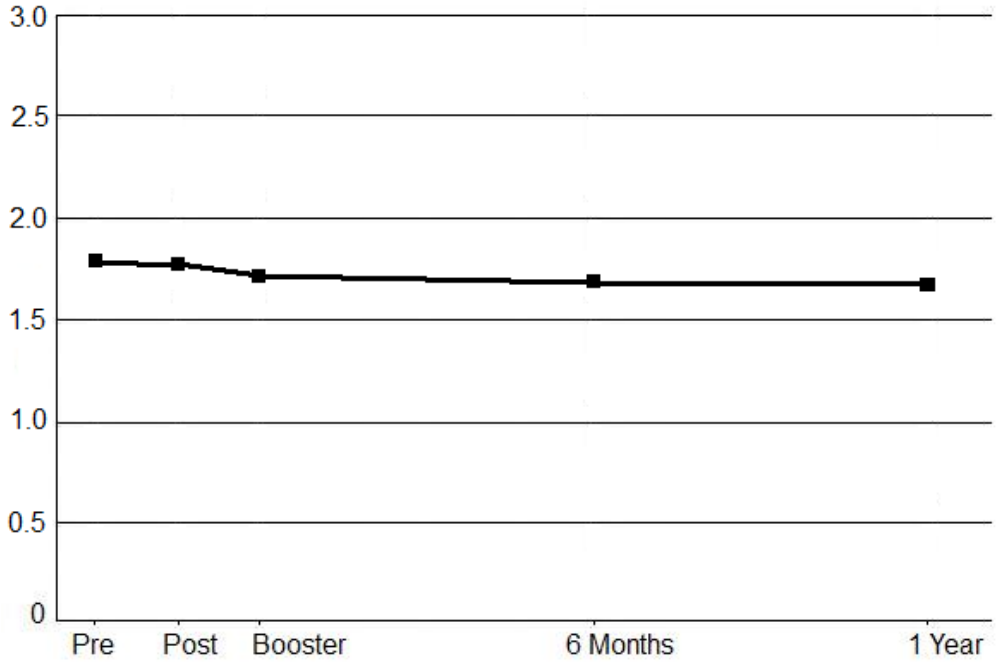

Figure 5. Relationship instability: Raw mean scores.

Table 13

Relationship Instability: Full Model

Fixed effects	*b*	*SE*	*t-ratio*	*df*
Intercept (π_0)	1.76**	.03	62.93	1308
Marital status (γ_{001})	.02	.03	.49	1308
Household income (γ_{002})	-.004**	.001	-3.37	1308
Age (γ_{010})	-.00 5	.003	-1.70	841
Gender (γ_{020})	.08**	.02	4.21	841
Never married (γ_{030})	.001	.04	.02	841
Second marriage(γ_{040})	-.01	.03	-.35	841
Higher order marriage (γ_{050})	.04	.04	.92	841
Latino (γ_{060})	-.03	.05	-.62	841
Other race (γ_{070})	-.06	.06	-1.00	841

(table continues)

Education (γ_{080})	.02*	.006	2.65	841
Personal earnings (γ_{090})	.01	.004	1.26	841
Surveys completed (γ_{0100})	.05*	.02	2.34	841
Linear slope (π_1)	-.20*	.07	-2.79	841
Marital status (γ_{101})	.33**	.08	3.85	841
Household income (γ_{102})	.002	.003	.67	841
Age (γ_{110})	-.001	.02	-.07	841
Gender (γ_{120})	-.01	.12	-.07	841
Never married (γ_{130})	-.42	.25	-1.68	841
Second marriage(γ_{140})	-.03	.14	-.21	841
Higher order marriage (γ_{150})	.42	.25	1.67	841
Latino (γ_{160})	-.35	.31	-1.12	841
Other race (γ_{170})	.37	.35	1.075	841
Education (γ_{180})	-.01	.03	-.26	841
Personal earnings (γ_{190})	-.01	.02	-.34	841
Surveys completed (γ_{1100})	.08	.10	.78	841
Quadratic slope (π_2)	.40	.36	1.10	4054
Marital status (γ_{201})	-1.53**	.41	-3.73	4054
Household income (γ_{202})	.01	.01	.80	4054
Age (γ_{210})	-.04	.08	-.46	4054
Gender (γ_{220})	-.21	.59	-.36	4054
Never married (γ_{230})	-.54	1.19	-.45	4054
Second marriage(γ_{240})	.14	.72	.19	4054
Higher order marriage (γ_{250})	-.15	1.23	-.12	4054
Latino (γ_{260})	1.65	1.46	1.13	4054

(table continues)

Other race (γ_{270})	3.10	1.76	1.76	4054
Education (γ_{280})	-.03	.16	-.79	4054
Personal earnings (γ_{290})	-.15	.12	-1.27	4054
Surveys completed (γ_{2100})	.42	.54	.78	4054
Cubic slope (π_3)	-.01	.38	-.01	4054
Marital status (γ_{301})	1.10*	.44	2.52	4054
Household income (γ_{302})	-.02	.01	-1.27	4054
Age (γ_{310})	.04	.08	.53	4054
Gender (γ_{320})	.06	.62	.10	4054
Never married (γ_{330})	1.23	1.29	.95	4054
Second marriage(γ_{340})	-.18	.72	-.26	4054
Higher order marriage (γ_{350})	-.22	1.28	-.17	4054
Latino (γ_{360})	-1.29	1.53	-.84	4054
Other race (γ_{370})	-3.78*	1.84	-2.05	4054
Education (γ_{380})	.02	.16	.10	4054
Personal earnings (γ_{390})	.13	.12	1.09	4054
Surveys completed (γ_{3100})	-.54	.54	-1.00	4054

*$p < .05$ **$p \leq .001$

Based on the results from the full model, a second model was created only using those variables which significantly predicted relationship instability. In cases where the level-1 time variables were nonsignificant, no level-2 or level-3 variables were included. Therefore, only the intercept and linear slope was included in this analysis as well as the subsequent level-2 and 3 statistically significant variables (i.e., gender, education, household income, and marital status).

Table 14 presents the results of the second model for relationship instability. The most notable changes in the second model is the statistical nonsignificance of the linear slope and

Table 14

Relationship Instability: Second Model

Fixed effects	*b*	*SE*	*t-ratio*	*df*
Intercept (π_0)	1.77**	.03	72.22	1309
Household income (γ_{001})	-.004**	.00	-3.46	1309
Gender (γ_{010})	.08*	.02	5.45	859
Education (γ_{020})	.02*	.01	2.72	859
Surveys completed (γ_{030})	.04*	.02	2.24	859
Linear slope (π_1)	-.01	.03	-.20	859
Marital status (γ_{101})	.06	.05	1.12	859

*$p < .05$ **$p \leq .001$

level-3 marital status variables. The predicted intercept for relationship instability remained statistically significant at 1.77 ($p \leq .001$) as did household income (b = -.004, $p \leq .001$), gender (b = .08, $p \leq .001$), education (b = .02, $p < .05$), and the number of surveys completed (b = .04, $p <$ .05). Because this model no longer shows statistically significant time effects, no further examination of data is needed.

Cost Analysis

The final research question of this study includes determining the cost of implementing the *Smart Steps* program. Based on data taken from yearly financial reports, Table 15 shows the yearly cost of implementing the *Smart Steps* program, the number of adults and youth served, and the number of classes attended for each federal grant. Individuals could attend a total of six classes and one booster session; however, individuals could discontinue or miss classes at any time, creating an unequal number of individuals served versus classes attended. These

"ingredients" as described by Levin and McEwan (2001) provide the basis for estimating the total cost per unit of the two federal grants.

Under the first funded federal grant entitled "Teaching Healthy Marriage Skills to Ethnically Diverse, Low-Income Couples in Stepfamilies", an average $422,654 dollars was spent each year in implementing the program, totaling $2,113,269. During this five year grant, a total of 2,017 adults and 1,887 youth were provided the *Smart Steps* curriculum; a total of 10,339 adult and 8,024 youth classes; and 114 courses (six class sessions and one booster session). Based on these totals, the estimated CPU for this grant was $541.31 per individual; $263.37 per *Smart Steps* class.

Under the second federal grant entitled "Teaching Healthy Marriage Skills to Latino, Low-Income Couples in Stepfamilies", an average $224,972 was spent each year, totaling $1,124,860. During this five year time, 1,166 adults and 728 youth were provided services; 5,899 adult and 3,138 youth classes; and 45 courses. The estimated CPU for this grant was $593.91 per individual; $358.46 per class.

In total, $3,238,129 was spent between the two federally funded grants; serving 3,183 adults and 2,615 youth (5,798 individuals) or 16,238 adult classes and 11,162 youth classes (24,400 classes). The CPU for the two federal grants combined was $558.49 per individual; $118.18 per classes; and $20,365.59 per course.

Table 15

Programmatic Costs of Smart Steps Program by Grant

Teaching Healthy Marriage Skills to Ethnically Diverse, Low-Income Couples in Stepfamilies (90FE0129): August 2006—September 2011

		Individuals served		Classes attended	
Year	Cost per year	Adults	Youth	Adults	Youth
Year 1 - 2006	$449,540	363	323	1,820	1,358
Year 2 - 2007	$411,711	470	366	2,371	1,390
Year 3 - 2008	$417,324	331	331	1,784	1,487
Year 4 - 2009	$417,324	413	442	2,125	1,994
Year 5 - 2010	$417,324	440	425	2,239	1,795
	$2,113,269	2,017	1,887	10,339	8,024

Estimated cost per unit

Individual $541.31

Class $263.37

Course $18,537.45
(six classes and one booster session)

Teaching Healthy Marriage Skills to Latino, Low-Income Couples in Stepfamilies (90YD0227):

August 2007—September 2012

		Individuals served		Classes attended	
Year	Cost er year	Adults	Youth	Adults	Youth
Year 1 - 2007	$224,972	198	135	967	532
Year 2 - 2008	$224,972	234	117	1242	512
Year 3 - 2009	$224,972	271	141	1318	612
Year 4 - 2010	$224,972	242	171	1237	768
Year 5 - 2011	$224,972	221	164	1135	714
	$1,124,860	1,166	728	5,899	3,138

(table continues)

Estimated cost per unit	
Individual	$593.91
Class	$358.46
Course (six classes and one booster session)	$24,996.89

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the changes experienced by adult participants enrolled in the *Smart Steps* RE program. The first research question investigated the longitudinal effects of relationship outcomes among *Smart Steps* participants from pre- to one-year post-program assessment. The second research question examined changes in relationship outcomes among differing participant groups, including ethnically diverse, gender, marital number, and socio-economic status. The final research question of this study examined the cost of implementing the *Smart Steps* program. Results from these analyses are discussed as well as theory, programmatic application, recommendations for the field, and policy implications.

Research Question 1

The first research question of this study examined how outcomes (i.e., relationship quality, couple commitment, and relationship instability) changed from pre- to one-year post-survey. In this study, only relationship quality was found to have statistically significant time effects. This positive finding was small in nature with an effect size of only a quarter of a point change in standard deviation. Modeled results of this study showed a curvilinear trend in the data, having improved relationship quality scores from pre- to booster-session programming, then subsequent declines to near pre-survey scores through one year post-program survey. These results are consistent with previously published meta-analysis showing improvements in relationship quality and related relationship quality outcomes (e.g., couple functioning) throughout RE programming and in short-term post-assessments (Hawkins et al., 2008; Hawkins & Fackrell, 2010; Lucier-Greer & Adler-Baeder, 2012). These improvements were not sustained however, and by one-year follow-up assessment, modeled participant relationship quality scores declined to near pre-program levels.

Finding unsustainable improvements in relationship quality among RE programs is not novel. Results from meta-analysis show a number of notable programs reporting no long-term relationship quality outcomes (Halford & Bodenmann, 2013; Halford & Wilson, 2009; Hawkins et al., 2008; Reardon-Anderson et al., 2005). The general consensus among programmers and researchers is the expectation for RE program effects to weaken over time; however, it is hoped these depleting effects will stabilize and relationship outcomes will remain statistically significant over time (e.g., Bodenmann, Pihet, Shantinath, Cina, & Widmer, 2006).

For couple commitment and relationship instability outcomes, no statistically significant time effects were found. In the first model of relationship instability, a statistically significant linear effect was found; however, when nonsignificant predictors were removed in the second model, this significance disappeared. Finding statistically nonsignificant couple commitment and relationship instability time effects was disappointing, but not surprising. The majority of published RE evaluations which include commitment and relationship stability measures show positive impacts on participants; however, there are notable published RE evaluations and meta-analysis showing nonsignificant time effects for these outcome variables (Carroll & Doherty, 2003; Halford & Bodenmann, 2013; Hawkins & Ooms, 2012). For example, Hsueh et al. (2012) followed low-income married couples with children for one year after RE programming. Although small positive relationship effects were found among participants (i.e., relationship satisfaction, communication, and self-reported relationship functioning), no statistical significance was found for relationship stability. Similarly, the Building Strong Families study (Wood, McConnell, Moore, Clarkwest, & Hsueh, 2012) which included a multi-site evaluation of 5,000 low-income couples, found that RE programming did not affect couples likelihood of staying together at one year post-program.

One possible reason for finding only small statistically significant changes in relationship quality, and no changes in couple commitment and relationship instability over time, is the

amount of RE dosage provided during and after the *Smart Steps* course. *Smart Steps* is a six module curriculum taught in six 2-hour class sessions. Participants are further provided a one hour booster session, approximately six weeks after the completion of the six classes, and later mailed stepfamily/relationship improvement factsheets at 6 months and 1 year post-program. In total, participants in this program could potentially receive 13 hours of in-person RE. This amount is considered a moderate dosage for RE programming in comparison to the field which ranges from 1 to 120 hours, with a mean of 12 hours. Among general RE programming that targets low-risk populations, evidence suggests between 9 and 20 hours of programming is needed to ensure programmatic efficacy (Hawkins et al., 2012). Findings from the current study suggest that 12 hours of initial programming, and one hour of follow-up RE, was enough to only show statistically significant increases in relationship quality in the short-term. Twelve hours of *Smart Steps* appears to be insufficient in positively impacting couple commitment and relationship instability at post-program.

Additional possible reasons for the lack of statistically significant changes over time in couple commitment and relationship instability are ceiling and selection effects. A ceiling effect refers to the lack of variability among individual scores from pre- to post-test assessment (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). In examining the mean changes of couple commitment and relationship instability, a mean change of only .04 and .01 was reported from pre- to post-survey. This may also represent a possible selection effect of program participants. Although this program targeted at-risk ethnically diverse and low-income stepfamily groups, participants in this study reported on average high levels of couple commitment (average of 4.40 on a 5-point scale) and low relationship instability scores (average of 1.67 on a 5-point scale). This finding suggests that although the program targeted at-risk population groups, more resilient families with higher levels of commitment and stability actually participated in the program. These findings further suggest that although an at-risk population was targeted, this program may not have served

distressed couples who are experiencing low relationship quality, commitment, and high instability levels.

Scholars have noted the need to provide follow-up programming after completing an RE course to ensure sustained effects on program participants (Braukhaus, Hahlweg, Kroeger, Groth, & Fehm-Wolfsdorf, 2003; Ooms & Wilson, 2004). RE should not be viewed as a one-time treatment service (Silliman, Stanley, Coffin, Markman, & Jordan, 2001); rather, as a means to ensure family challenges and stressors do not inhibit continued practice of knowledge and skills gained during RE programming. Follow-up sessions may be in the form of formal classroom programming, assigned mentors, group sessions, workshops, online education, and so forth, generally showing improvements in knowledge and positive relationship outcomes among attending participants (Braukhaus et al., 2003; Ooms & Wilson, 2004; Vaterlaus, 2009).

Conducting follow-up programming may be particularly important for disadvantaged populations who are at-risk of experiencing multiple stressors such as poverty, high relationship dissolution rates, those who experience multiple transitions, poor child and family outcomes, and so forth (e.g., Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Ganong & Coleman, 2004; Klevens, 2007; Ooms & Wilson, 2004). Vaterlaus (2009) has examined the impact of booster sessions within the *Smart Steps* program, with program participants reporting positive gains in healthy stepfamily knowledge at the end of the booster session. The positive, short-term relationship quality effects found in the current study concur with Vaterlaus's findings, suggesting that booster sessions reinforce skills and knowledge learned during the *Smart Steps* curriculum, reinforcing positive relationship quality. The primary difficulty as scholars have noted, however, in providing follow-up RE booster sessions, is the difficulty in persuading couples to attend (e.g., Pregulman et al., 2013).

Twelve hours of *Smart Steps* programming, as suggested by Hawkins and colleagues (2012), is within the suggested amount of RE programming needed to show efficacy. There

remains, however, uncertainty regarding the appropriate amount of RE needed to positively impact higher risk populations to ensure sustained effects. Scholars have noted the overall lack of RE programming addressing the contextual stressors experienced by disadvantaged populations (e.g., economic stresses, discrimination, and ambiguity; Johnson, 2013). Low-income, ethnically diverse stepfamilies are a unique population group with historically higher rates of family dissolution, poverty, and greater likelihood of negative family outcomes in comparison to higher-income, European Americans, and nonstepfamilies (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004; DeNavas-Walt et al., 2008; Falk & Larson, 2007; Ganong & Coleman, 2004; Goodwin et al., 2010; Klevens, 2007; Landale & Oropesa, 2007). The *Smart Steps* curriculum specifically addresses the contextual stressors experienced by stepfamily couples such as coparenting, gaining realistic stepfamily expectations, empathy, and so forth. Therefore, the current study adds to the RE field suggesting that the *Smart Steps* is able to serve at-risk populations, showing short-term improvements in relationship quality over time.

Research Question 2

The second research question of the current study was to determine how relationship outcomes differ among participant groups. Although I expected group differences to be associated with different slopes in this study, results showed no group by time interactions; rather, only statistically significant intercept differences for second level gender and third level household income variables for relationship quality. No other group by time differences were found among couple commitment or relationship instability variables in the final models.

Finding gender differences in relationship quality scores is not an uncommon finding (Baucom et al., 2006; Fowers, 1991; Shek, 1995). Previously published findings on gender differences in relationship quality show both dissimilarities and similarities within RE (e.g., Baucom et al., 2006; Fowers, 1991; Hawkins et al., 2008; Shek, 1995; Stanley et al., 2005).

Previous research has discussed the inequality of gender roles in relationships, and the disproportionate amount of stress and disadvantages for women versus men in relationships (e.g., role conflicts, role demands, and differing expectations; Bernard, 1972; Gove, 1972; Nock, 1998). This is particularly true among stepfamilies who experience unique stressors such as dealing with ex-partners, unclear expectations, stepparenting issues, and so forth, which directly impact marital quality. As described by Schramm and Adler-Baeder (2012), women are particularly impacted by stepfamily specific stressors, exhibit higher levels of stress, and report lower satisfaction levels than men. These stressors are further heightened, by economic pressures, which was prevalent in the current study. Therefore, it is not surprising that intercept gender differences were found in relationship quality levels among participants.

Among extant RE literature, both statistically significant and statistically nonsignificant gender effects exist (e.g., Hawkins et al., 2008, McGeorge & Carlson, 2006; Stanley et al., 2005; Thuen & Lærum, 2005). However, the majority of RE literature reports no gender differences among program participants, particularly when examining time by gender interactions (e.g., Hawkins et al., 2008; McGeorge & Carlson, 2006; Stanley et al., 2005; Thuen & Lærum, 2005). The current study differs from the majority of extant RE in that it targets largely ethnically diverse and low-income stepfamilies. Because these families experience a number of unique challenges which are unfelt by more traditional families (Ganong & Coleman, 2004), this may explain the statistically significant intercept differences of the current study, which is generally unseen by the majority of published RE programming. However, this RE program remains similar to extant RE literature in that statistically nonsignificant time by gender effects are found (Hawkins et al., 2008; McGeorge & Carlson, 2006; Stanley et al., 2005; Thuen & Lærum, 2005). This suggests that although genders report differing levels of relationship quality, both men and women may experience similar trajectories of improvement over the course of an RE program.

Similar to gender differences, household income was found to be statistically significant at the intercept (i.e., post-program), meaning those with higher household income levels reported higher relationship quality. This finding is once again not surprising based on the wealth of knowledge regarding negative familial outcomes among low SES households (e.g., increased negative interpersonal development, at-risk behavior, marital instability, and stressors; Conger et al., 1994; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Fagan, 2006; Lichter & Carmalt, 2009). One of the primary justifications for Healthy Marriage funding in the mid-2000s was to support low-income families who were under-served in RE programming. By providing these types of services, as suggested by Amato and Maynard (2007), low-income couples would experience improvements within their relationships which in turn would reduce divorce rates, nonmarital births, poverty, and reduce the reliance on welfare and other government poverty assistance programming. Although this study cannot attest to the level of reliance on welfare, this study met the primary purpose of HMI demonstration grants by serving low-income families who, as this study shows at the completion of the *Smart Steps* program, report lower levels of marital quality than higher-income families (60% of the sample in this study made less than $25,000 per year).

Findings from the first research question showed no time by income effects for relationship quality. Scholars have noted the need for RE research to learn how various SES groups are impacted by programming (Hawkins & Fackrell, 2010). The second research question of this study showed that *Smart Steps* participants reported statistically significant differences in relationship quality levels at the intercept; however, there was no group by time effects over the course of the program. Therefore, this study adds to extant literature suggesting that both low- and middle-income participants, although different on reported relationship quality levels, can experience similar improvements in relationship quality during an RE program over time.

Other statistically significant intercept group differences among examined relationship outcomes included level two marital status and level three household income for couple

commitment, and level two gender, education, surveys completed, marital status, and level three household income for relationship instability. As discussed, these group differences attest to this curriculum's purpose in serving at-risk populations who may benefit from RE programming. For example, low-income couples are at greater risk for family disruption, poor child outcomes, and increased likelihood of using welfare services (Conger et al., 1994; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Duncan et al., 1994; McLoyd, 1998; McLoyd et al., 1994); those in an unmarried relationship report lower commitment levels than married couples (Huang, Smock, Manning, & Bergstrom-Lynch, 2011); and women generally report greater marital dissatisfaction than men (Amato & Maynard, 2007; Brennan, Barnett, & Gareis, 2001).

Results from this study further showed statistically nonsignificant group by time differences among all outcome variables. These nonsignificant findings may be a reflection of the programs design targeting stepfamilies. The *Smart Steps* program is specifically designed to address the unique stressors and challenges faced by stepfamily participants, such as dealing with ex-spouses, stepparenting, clarifying expectations, and so forth (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004). These stressors are unique among all stepfamilies, no matter education background, income level, ethnic diversity, or other group characteristics. All participants in this study shared a common family relationship thread (i.e., had at least one child from a previous relationship within the family), thereby possibly limiting other potential group differences. For example, low- and high-income participant's exhibit group by time differences within traditional RE programming (Hawkins & Fackrell, 2010); however, one may hypothesize that because families in the *Smart Steps* program were able to connect and empathize on common stepfamily issues, apparent income and other group differences were possibly negated. Similarly, this study adds to previous Lucier-Greer et al. (2012) research which suggests that first time married and remarried spouses can similarly experience improvements in relationship outcomes in RE. The current study concurs with this previous research and adds stepfamilies in never married, first time

married, remarried, and higher order remarriage groups to these findings, suggesting similarly relationship outcome benefits can be obtained for differing relationship types in RE programming. Once again, because these families shared similarities in stepfamily functioning, relationship type group differences may have been negated.

This possible hypothesis for lack of group differences among RE programming is similarly discussed by Skogrand, Dansie, and colleagues (2011), who conducted qualitative interviews of *Smart Steps* participant's one-year after completing the RE course. They noted the lack of variation in participant responses in describing benefits of the RE program among Latino and European American participants. These authors suggest that living in a stepfamily situation may outweigh other cultural or socioeconomic factors when examining RE programming. The quantitative, statistically nonsignificant group findings of the current study support this hypothesis. Future research could examine further stepfamily specific demographic criteria, such as number of children living in the household, number of biological children, length of stepfamily experience, and so forth, to determine if group differences in relationship outcomes within this targeted population exist.

Research Question 3

The final research question of this study calculated the cost of implementing the *Smart Steps* program. The total combined cost of the "Teaching Healthy Marriage Skills to Ethnically Diverse, Low-Income Couples in Stepfamilies" and "Teaching Healthy Marriage Skills to Latino, Low-Income Couples in Stepfamilies" grants totaled $3,238,129, serving 3,183 adults and 2,615 youth over a five year time period. Calculated cost per unit analysis showed individual costs of $541.31 and $593.91 per *Smart Steps* course in each respective grant. Individual class costs of $263.37 and $358.46 per class and $18,537.45 and $24,996.89 per *Smart Steps* course

respectively. In summary, the combined CPU for both grants was $558.49 per individual, $118.18 per class, or $20,365.59 per *Smart Steps* course.

The call by scholars for publications which examine the cost of RE is common; however, few exist focusing on this topic. In comparison to a similar RE program, PREP, this *Smart Steps* program CPU is estimated to be slightly less costly, with PREP'S estimated per person cost of $633 and *Smart Steps* at $558.49 (Engsheden et al., 2013). However, this *Smart Steps* estimate is most likely higher than what is necessary to actually implement this type programming within a community. Due to the multi-site scope of these federally funded grants, there were large administrative and evaluation costs. Similar to the Engsheden et al. PREP estimate, the CPU of *Smart Steps* will most likely be reduced after the initial training of facilitators, purchase of curriculum, and so forth, which could make the practical implementation of this program more feasible.

Scholars have noted the costs of group-formatted RE in comparison to other more time intensive programming (e.g., therapeutic services). In examining the cost-effectiveness of a variety of RE type programming, Halford (2011) suggested that curriculum-based RE (e.g., *Smart Steps*) may be best suited for couples who are at moderate to high-risk of relationship dissolution. Low-risk couples may not need the somewhat time intensive services of curriculum-based RE; rather, a one-time RE session or self-assessment/feedback will likely provide the needed RE at a fifth of the cost of a multi-session RE program. Rather, moderate- to high-risk couples are likely to benefit from curriculum-based RE, particularly if unique needs are identified among the attending participants (e.g., stepfamilies having unrealistic expectations, and issues with stepchildren and coparenting).

Some scholars have commented on the use of curriculum-based RE programming as a cost saving tool for couples in need of more intensive therapy services. For example, a hypothetical cost of a couple attending 20 sessions of couple/marriage therapy, at an average cost

of $100 per session (National Directory of Marriage & Family Counseling, 2013) results in a total cost of $2,000. As suggested by Halford (2011), even if curriculum-based RE can lower the number of sessions needed for couples, for example only needing 10 therapy sessions rather than 20 ($1,000 total cost), savings in therapy costs could potentially occur. Based on this "stepped model" approach to RE (Halford, 2011), researchers are optimistic in RE's ability to positively impact couple relationship outcomes among higher-risk families while reducing potential therapy costs.

Although the purpose of the current study was not to examine Halford's (2011) "stepped model" approach, findings from this study can help inform the field as to the potential costs of such programming and relevant RE models for stepfamilies. The current study fits within the suggested target population for curriculum-based RE as discussed by Halford. In summary, the combined CPU for both grants was $558.49 per individual, $118.18 per class, or $20,365.59 per *Smart Steps* course. Further research is needed to determine the true cost-effectiveness of such programming and proposed RE models.

Intervention Theory

Intervention theory provides a conceptual framework for studying the prevention of human dysfunction (Coie et al., 1993). In order to counteract family dysfunction, intervention programs emphasize the reduction of potential risk factors while reinforcing protective factors among population groups. The current study implemented the *Smart Steps* RE program, targeting low-income, ethnically diverse, stepfamily populations. These populations are at-risk for a number of factors including, but not limited to, relationship dissolution, relationships instability, boundary ambiguity, unrealistic expectations, unclear social norms and expectations, poverty, unwed childbearing, limited social support, and discrimination (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004; Bumpass & Raley, 2007; DeNavas-Walt et al., 2008; Ganong & Coleman, 2004; Landale

& Oropesa, 2007; Perez et al., 2008; Rector et al., 2002). Furthermore, intervention theory emphasizes the need to reinforce protective factors, which include maintaining realistic expectations, strong couple and family relationships, family values, strong cultural bonds, extended family, and government or RE programmatic supports to name a few (Adler-Baeder & Higginbotham, 2004; Ganong & Coleman, 2004; Raffaelli & Wiley, 2013; Robertson et al., 2006; Skogrand et al., 2009).

The *Smart Steps* program was designed as an educational curriculum based on intervention theory, focusing on the strengths of stepfamilies while educating and implementing protective factors (Adler-Baeder, 2001). In theory, this RE program is meant to help stepfamilies build upon protective factors acquiring needed skills and social support to overcome potential risk factors. Previous research on the *Smart Steps* program suggests positive couple and stepfamily gains including increased stepfamily knowledge, communication, agreement on parenting, finances, co-parenting, dealing with ex-partners, increased empathy, family engagement, social support, and so forth (Higginbotham & Adler-Baeder, 2010; Higginbotham et al., 2010; Skogrand, Torres, et al., 2010; Skogrand et al., 2011; Skogrand, Mendez, & Higginbotham, 2013). However, findings from the current study bring into question this intervention's ability to enhance couple commitment and relationship instability outcomes and show sustained effects of relationship quality.

An important component of intervention theory emphasizes the need for science and practice to play a complementary role. In doing so, research should inform intervention programming and vice versa. The design and implementation of this *Smart Steps* program was based on extant literature from the RE field, policymaker expectations, and the desires of interested stakeholders (e.g., Utah State University and family service agencies). For example, scholars and RE practitioners have emphasized the need for further development and evaluation of RE programming, particularly among underserved populations (Halford & Wilson, 2009;

Hawkins & Fackrell, 2010; Lucier-Greer et al., 2012; Reardon-Anderson et al., 2005). Furthermore, the proposals for HMI grants emphasized the need for programs to (a) demonstrate innovative means of program delivery targeting at-risk populations, (b) implement an evaluation, and (c) follow best practices in the RE field such as incorporating follow-up booster sessions in program implementation (ACF, 2006, 2007).

The current study further builds upon intervention theory and the interplay of science and practice by providing new evidence to the field regarding RE's ability to influence long-term relationship quality, as well as an inability to improve couple commitment and relationship instability, among low-income and ethnically diverse stepfamilies. In moving forward with future programming, evidence from this study should be used to improve future programming. For example, the findings from this study raise questions regarding the appropriate dosage and follow-up services of RE programming in serving at-risk populations. In the current study, participants could attend up to 12 hours of RE as well as a 6-week follow-up booster session which, as Vaterlaus (2009) suggests, reinforces skills and knowledge learned during the *Smart Steps* program. This quantity of initial RE and follow-up programming was insufficient in demonstrating lasting improvements in relationship quality over time or any positive impacts on couple commitment and relationship instability measures. Future programming should consider adjusting program dosage and follow-up programming in an effort to potentially enhance program efficacy among at-risk populations groups (ethnically diverse, low-income, and stepfamilies) as well as more resilient populations (highly committed, stable relationships).

Although this study targeted an at-risk ethnically diverse, low-income stepfamilies, pre-survey couple commitment and relationship instability mean scores suggested that participants who attended the *Smart Steps* program were perhaps more resilient in nature, representing a less distressed population. This possible selection effect in RE is reflective in previous research as well as within the current study (cf., Stanley, 2001). Rather than serving more distressed couples

within the targeted at-risk population groups (i.e. couples with low pre-survey relationship quality, commitment, and high instability scores), this study seemed to serve more resilient families who self-selected into the program. This possible effect should be considered in future RE programming efforts by ensuring that at-risk populations are not only targeted, as was the case in this study, but at-risk families actually attend.

Intervention's ability to provide cultural and group sensitivity is another important concept discussed by intervention theory (Coie et al., 1993). Throughout the *Smart* Steps program cultural sensitivity was incorporated in a number of ways, including but not limited to, yearly cultural sensitivity trainings to foster effective facilitation of Latino participants, offering Spanish and English courses, and Spanish evaluation materials. This study further examined population group differences among relationship outcomes, finding only intercept differences for household income and gender groups. Furthermore, no statistically significant group by time differences was shown. The latter finding suggests the *Smart Steps* program was able to serve differing participant groups similarly, increasing relationship quality scores and an inability to positively impact couple commitment and relationship instability measures.

Finally, intervention theory emphasizes the need to use rigorous methodology designs, sampling, and statistical analyses in scientific study (Coie et al., 1993). The current study follows recommendations by the RE field and policymakers to provide evidence of an RE's ability to reach underserved and at-risk populations in examining the long-term effects of relationship outcomes for program participants (Hawkins et al., 2013; Hawkins & Ooms, 2012). This study further follows intervention theory by incorporating sophisticated hierarchical linear modeling statistics which account for the multiple levels of data (i.e., time, individual, and couple data) as well as the attrition and unequal spacing of data points in the study (Hox, 1995; Kwok et al., 2007; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). This type of analysis moves beyond basic statistical analysis,

which violates important statistical assumptions, such as the independence of data; thereby, providing more confidence in this study's results.

Application and Suggestions for Future Research

Extant literature has demonstrated effectiveness among RE programs to increase relationship outcomes over time, particularly among European American, moderate- to high-income, and first marriage families (Hawkins et al., 2008; Reardon-Anderson et al., 2005). The current study adds to the growing number of published RE evaluations coming from HMI demonstration grants, providing new insights into the ability of an RE program to impact stepfamily, low-income, and ethnically diverse populations. This study includes data from 2,828 adult participants, making it the largest examination of an RE program serving low-income, ethnically diverse stepfamilies to date (Lucier-Greer & Adler-Baeder, 2012). Furthermore this study is one of a few to provide a one-year follow-up evaluation component of a stepfamily education program (see Lucier-Greer & Adler-Baeder, 2012).

The overall effect size of relationship quality, which was the only relationship outcome with statistically significant time effects, in this study was approximately a quarter of a point change in the standard deviation. According to Cohen (1988), this represents a small change in participant outcomes. Although the effect size of this study is considered small by Cohen's standards, among the RE field it remains a practical finding. Wolf (1986) suggests an effect size of .25 represents a practical difference among education programs.

The longitudinal findings of this study add to current political discussions among scholars and policymakers regarding the worthwhile nature of RE and its ability to sustain healthy couple relationships among at-risk populations (Hawkins et al., 2013; Johnson, 2013). The statistically nonsignificant time effects found in the current study add to an already mixed RE literature suggesting a need for further research in not only the impacts of such programming but also what

is required to ensure sustained improvements in key relationship outcomes (e.g., sustainability). The current study consisted of a 13-hour stepfamily RE program which met the recommended dosage for general RE for showing programmatic efficacy (Hawkins et al., 2012). However, this program incorporated a unique population group, having higher rates of divorce, family complexity, and increased risk of other negative family outcomes. Therefore, greater RE dosage may be needed in order to ensure programmatic effects as well as an expanded use of booster or follow-up session programming to help ensure the sustainability of such programming.

Although it is difficult to know exactly what amount of RE dosage is needed to show improvements in targeted relationship outcomes among at-risk and more resilient population, as well as to what degree follow-up programming is needed to sustain these effects in general; higher dosage RE programs are able to show greater programmatic impacts, especially among at-risk couples (Hawkins & Ooms, 2012). Furthermore, RE programs may incorporate more unique and intensive follow-up programming including online education, couple mentors, workshops, and so forth, as a means of ensuring sustainable programmatic effects (Braukhaus et al., 2003; Ooms & Wilson, 2004). Based on extant literature and results from the current study, with an increase in *Smart Steps* dosage and additional follow-up education, it could be expected that this program might still become a reliable intervention to improve long-term relationship outcomes among low-income, ethnically diverse stepfamilies. Future research and programming should continue to target this unique population adding to current knowledge regarding appropriate RE dosage and follow-up programming.

In addition to further examining the appropriate amount of RE dosage to ensure programmatic efficacy, gaining an understanding of how to actively recruit high-risk couples into RE programming is also needed. In the current study, ethnically diverse and low-income stepfamilies were targeted in recruitment efforts (see Skogrand, Reck, et al., 2010). Although the goal of the *Smart Steps* program was to serve this generally at-risk population, pre-survey mean

scores from this study indicate a more resilient, less distressed, population than expected, having fairly high couple commitment and low relationship instability levels. Previous research has suggested a possible selection effect in RE programming (cf., Stanley, 2001); future research and programming, therefore, should strive to not only target these at-risk populations in general, but actively recruit and serve identified distressed families. This may require new strategies in recruitment and retention efforts by RE programs.

Possibly one of the most practical findings of the current study in terms of programmatic application to the RE field is the lack of statistically significant time effects among differing participant groups (i.e., men and women; never married, first time married, second marriage, and higher order marriage; Latinos, European Americans, and other races). Historically, RE programs were developed and implemented predominantly serving homogeneous middle-class, European American participants (Dion, 2005; Ooms & Wilson, 2004). As the need for RE programs to expand and serve nontraditional populations has increased, scholars noted the inadequacy of RE programs within the field. For example, scholars have pointed to programs lack of content regarding unique stressors and challenges faced by at-risk populations, lack of cultural sensitivity, and were generally unproven best practices in serving diverse groups.

Findings from the current study suggest that the *Smart Steps* program is able to not only serve middle-class, European American stepfamilies, but also a more heterogeneous population. This finding is especially pertinent when considering changes in and further development of the *Smart Steps,* and similar RE curriculum. Scholars have noted the need to adapt RE curriculum to ensure program content is sensitive to at-risk populations (Ooms & Wilson, 2004). In the current study's *Smart Steps* program, population sensitivity was emphasized throughout design, implementation, and evaluation processes as was required by federal grant guidelines. In doing so, this program ensured the proper translation of curriculum and supporting materials into Spanish (i.e., Latin American Spanish), yearly cultural sensitivity training for program

facilitators, and provided income- and culturally-sensitive programmatic supports to participants (e.g., cash, gas cards, and grocery gift certificates to Latino stores). However, no major changes within the stepfamily content of the *Smart Steps* curriculum were made.

These findings suggest that the *Smart Steps* curriculum, in conjunction with programmatic cultural sensitivity efforts, was able to serve an overall heterogeneous group of stepfamily participants showing small but positive increases in relationship quality in the short-term. These findings add to current discussions regarding RE curriculums ability to adapt and serve diverse groups, even when originally designed and tested with middle-class, European American populations. Only a handful of curricula have published evaluative findings using multiple at-risk populations (e.g., PREP, RELATE, and Couple CARE). This makes it difficult, as critiqued by Johnson (2012), for practitioners and clinicians to decipher among the extant programs which of them are most effective for any targeted population. RE curriculum should, therefore, be readily evaluated using multiple populations and accurately document the findings to support future program and curriculum development efforts. Future research should also document best practices in creating cultural sensitivity within RE programs including added programmatic supports and curriculum variations. Although some research exists regarding suggested cultural sensitivity in RE programming (Huang, 2005; Ooms & Wilson, 2004; Skogrand et al., 2009), these efforts need replication among all population groups and RE curriculum.

A final point to make regarding the current study and its application to the RE field is its inconsistent findings with previously published qualitative research from this same *Smart Steps* program. To date, over a half dozen published qualitative studies exist providing positive qualitative evidence of the *Smart Steps* program on stepfamily participants. The majority of this research stems from 40 participant interviews conducted immediately after the *Smart Steps* course and 20 follow-up interviews among these same participants one year later. From these

interviews, published qualitative evidence shows improved child, couple, and family relationship outcomes including, but not limited to, increased empathy and expression of feelings, improved couple commitment, family stability, conflict resolution, agreement on key relationship issues, social support, communication, interactions with ex-partners, parenting, relationship skills, and family bonding/unity (Higginbotham et al., 2010, 2012; Higginbotham & Skogrand, 2010; Reck, Skogrand, Higginbotham & Davis, 2013; Skogrand, Dansie, et al., 2011; Skogrand, Davis, et al., 2011; Skogrand et al., 2013; Skogrand, Torres, et al., 2010).

Although these qualitative findings show important benefits of the *Smart Steps* program as described by participants, these findings are not reflective in the quantitative results of the current study. This is an important example of both the strengths and weaknesses of the current RE field and research in general. On one hand, qualitative evidence provides the researcher with an ability to selectively study issues in depth and without the constraints of predetermined categories or standardized measurements (Patton, 1990). Within the current *Smart Steps* program this is apparent among published qualitative data showing detailed themes of benefits to participants, especially among unique groups, including married and unmarried couples, lesbian couples, Latino participants, stepfathers, and children. On the other hand, the current quantitative study maintains the advantage of examining a large number of participants (N = 2,828) on validated and reliable relationship quality outcomes (see methods section of this dissertation for measurement information). This type of study allows for the aggregation of data, creating the statistical power needed to conduct sophisticated statistical analysis (Patton, 1990), allowing for a more generalizable and standardized set of findings which can more easily be compared to the broader RE field.

It is generally the hope of researchers and program evaluators today that qualitative and quantitative findings within a single program will parallel one another; with quantitative data providing generalizable, statistically strong evidence to the field while qualitative data provides

depth and clarity as to the meaning of quantitative effects. For example, in the current study, statistically significant increases in relationship quality at the completion of the *Smart Steps* program are shown. Similarly, published qualitative evidence from this program show multiple couple benefits that directly impact relationship quality, including improved communication, agreement on relationship issues, and couple/family bonding. This triangulation of data is ideal in evaluation research since no single method can adequately show causality (Patton, 1990). However, the current study also shows inconsistent findings with already published qualitative data. For example, Skogrand, Dansie, et al. (2011) conducted a 1-year follow-up study of 20 *Smart* Steps participants, presenting a number of sustained child, couple, and family relationship benefits. Of specific relevance to the current study, direct participant quotes described improvements in couple commitment and stability one-year after completing the program. Ideally, the quantitative evidence from the current study would confirm these previously published thematic findings, but this did not occur.

A number of possible reasons for these nonconforming results can by hypothesized. One such hypothesis includes a possible selection effect of those who participated in the 40 post-program and 20 one-year post-program interviews used in the previously published qualitative studies. Interviewees in these publications were selected based on a convenience sample of participants who attended the final class of the *Smart Steps* program (e.g., Skogrand, Dansie, et al., 2011). These interviewed participants may have been significantly different in some way in comparison to other participating individuals (i.e., selection effect). Perhaps, for example, these participants stood-out in their respective classes, were more willing to discuss positive aspects of the program, and in turn perhaps gained the greatest benefits from the *Smart Steps* course. As is the purpose of qualitative research, these interviews painted a detailed portrait of RE effectiveness on a relatively small group of program participants (n = 40). The current study, however, was able to aggregate data from thousands of participants, removing this potential

selection effect, thereby showing perhaps a more accurate picture of relationship quality, couple commitment, and relationship instability trends among *Smart Steps* participants as a whole. Therefore, when asked, interviewees could provide specific examples of improved relationship outcomes; however, when quantified and aggregated as a whole, the perceived impacts of these individual improvements were diminished.

A second hypothesis for the inconsistency of qualitative and quantitative results within this *Smart Steps* program is the lack of diversity and limited nature of measurements used within the current study. Although the current study specifically measured relationship quality, couple commitment, and relationship instability of program participants over time, other important constructs which may have greatly benefited from the *Smart* Steps program were not analyzed. As suggested by Whitton, Nicholson, et al. (2008), drawing conclusions from RE programs can be difficult because of the lack of diverse evaluation measures used. Extant literature has examined a broader scope of relationship variables including understanding of relationship issues, expectations, relationship skills, social support, family environment, closeness, marital adjustment, conflict management, parenting/coparenting, marital satisfaction, hope, family cohesion, stress, and anxiety. Although the measured relationship constructs used in the current study are commonly used throughout the RE field, they may not accurately reflect important benefits acquired by program participants in this *Smart Steps* program. Further examination of RE programming, using broader evaluation measures is needed to more fully understand the effects of RE on stepfamily participants.

An example of this is seen in a preliminary quantitative examination of 356 participants in this *Smart Steps* program at pre-, post-, and booster session follow-up (Higginbotham & Skogrand, 2010). Similar to the current study, findings from Higginbotham and colleagues (2010) showed no statistically significant changes in relationship instability from pre- to booster session follow-up surveys. Unlike the current study however, Higginbotham and colleagues

additionally examined key relationship issues prevalent among stepfamily couples including the level of agreement on how to deal with finances, ex-partners, and parenting. Findings from this previous study showed statistically significant improvements in levels of agreement on each of the key issues examined over time. These findings suggest that additional important improvements in relationship outcomes may be present within this *Smart Steps* program; however, the current study did not examine such constructs. Similarly, previously published qualitative evidence from this program suggests a variety of positive impacts on *Smart Steps* participants, most of which were not included in the current study. Therefore, the current study only examines a limited scope of potential benefits to participating stepfamilies based on a narrower set of constructs. The measurement of these constructs (i.e., relationship quality, couple commitment, and relationship instability) may present a different picture than the more broadly examined qualitative studies which can incorporate multiple relationship constructs.

Although findings from the current study are inconsistent with previously published qualitative results, future programming and research can build upon these differing findings. As suggested by intervention theory (Coie et al., 1993), and program evaluation methodology (Patton, 1990), qualitative and quantitative findings from this *Smart* Steps program can build-upon and provide feedback for each other. For example, future qualitative efforts should take into account the quantitative results and program suggestions provided in previously published studies, including the current study. This means in future qualitative study, scholars should strive to improve upon possible identified limitations by using best practices in sample selection methodology to avoid potential selection effects. Future qualitative study could also incorporate research questions that may lead to a greater knowledge of how couple commitment and relationship instability are impacted over time, if at all. Similarly, future quantitative study should utilize the wealth of qualitative knowledge provided to the field in determining possible relationship outcome measures that may not be captured in RE survey evaluations. Finally, the

increased use of diverse outcomes measures among quantitative evaluation studies, based on published qualitative RE themes, may validate existing finding within RE qualitative research.

Policy Implications

The final analysis of this study examined the CPU of implementing the *Smart Steps* program. Although a very limited literature exists regarding CPU of RE programming, the findings from this study are comparable with that of other published estimates (Engsheden et al., 2013) and are within the subscribed amount expected when using a "stepped" approach to RE programming (Halford, 2011). These combined findings now provide a documented range of programmatic costs for currently used RE programming ($558-$633). It is important to note, the *Smart* Steps program used in this study was funded through federal HMI grants which included sufficient funds to conduct statewide RE programming, oversight by university faculty and personnel, and an extensive evaluation process. With this type of oversight and evaluation process, the estimated cost of implementing RE programming is inflated in comparison to RE programs which do not include such components. Future research should continue to provide cost-analysis findings of RE programs.

Federal level HMI demonstration grants in the mid-2000s created an ideal funding stream for both practitioners who desired to serve a large population of individuals, and researchers who examine programmatic effectiveness. However, with the completion of HMI discretionary funding and the elimination of "research/evaluation" monies in the 2011 federal fiscal budget for RE (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011) practitioners and researchers are beginning to meet at an impasse. Scholars are continuously calling for the improvement of evaluation processes, publication of RE results, and further study of RE effectiveness; while practitioners are concerned with cost-feasibility and programmatic sustainability. Determining the cost-effectiveness of RE programs and establishing general CPU's for RE programs can assist

researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in determining appropriate funding for future RE efforts. With the completion of HMI grant monies, it is not only important to create a dialogue as to the cost/benefits of RE on a national level, but also to determine how to implement such programming on a practical scale, utilizing current means of funding that may be more sustainable.

Study Limitations

This exploratory study utilized a nonrandom, noncontrol group program design. Therefore, statements of causation regarding relationship quality, couple commitment, and relationship instability outcomes on program participants cannot be made. Future research on stepfamily RE programming should incorporate a control group study design. As shown by Lucier-Greer and Adler-Baeder (2012), five of the 14 RE programs involved in their meta-analysis included a control group design, however only one of these included a one year follow-up. Additional study on the long-term effects of ethnically diverse and low-income stepfamilies in RE, utilizing a randomized control group approach is needed.

Although this study focused on serving ethnically diverse, low-income stepfamilies, the diversity within minority ethnic groups was not great. The major ethnic groups served in this study included European American and Latinos. Other ethnicities, such as African American, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native American groups were underrepresented in this study. This study provided RE services to stepfamilies throughout the state of Utah. Utah is demographically unique with higher than average fertility rates, family sizes, and a higher than average religious population, predominantly identifying as Latter-day Saints (Martin et al., 2013; World Population Statistics, 2013). The majority of participants in this study reported between one and five children living in the household (mean of 2.95 children). The major religious affiliations reported in this sample were The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (55%), Catholic (18%), and

no religious affiliation (14%). Religion and the presence of children are known to affect marital quality, couple commitment, and relationship instability (Call & Heaton, 1997; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Lichter & Carmalt, 2009). Additional research of stepfamily RE utilizing populations with various fertility and religious backgrounds is needed to confirm the findings of this study.

Although children were not specifically examined in this study, the presence of children may play an important role in relationship outcomes and RE attendance. For example, Latino families strongly identify strong marriages with the presence of children. Furthermore, Latino couples generally find it difficult to attend RE, as well as other couple focused activities, without having children within close proximity (Skogrand et al., 2009). Among both Latino and European American couples, having children involved in an RE program can improve the likelihood of attending (Skogrand, Reck, et al., 2010) as well as improve positive parenting, empathy, communication, and overall family functioning and unity (Higginbotham & Skogrand, 2010; Higginbotham et al., 2010; Skogrand, Davis, et al., 2011). Further examination of the effects of children attending RE is needed.

Data collection for this study utilized self-reported surveys given to participants before and after the *Smart Steps* course, immediately after the six week booster session, and through mailings at six months and one year post-program. These data collection procedures may incur potential limitations for this study. Best practices in survey development and implementations were utilized throughout the evaluation process, including instruction to complete surveys independent and confidential of others, providing participants with an unidentified envelope to ensure confidentiality of data, and sending a $2 incentive with pre-paid return address envelopes in mailed surveys (Dillman et al., 2009). However, potential bias may occur among participants. One such bias is social desirability, meaning participants respond to survey questions in a way they believe is socially most desirable rather than choosing responses that reflect their true

feelings (Grimm, 2010). With stepfamilies feeling additional social stigmas and pressures (Ganong & Coleman, 2004) these participants may have answered survey questions in a way they perceived to be correct.

Another potential limitation of the current study as previously discussed is a possible ceiling effect created by the true pre/post data collection nature of this study. A ceiling effect refers to an individual scoring high on a pre-survey measure, than having limited response room (i.e., variability) on the post-survey to shown improvement over time (Gall et al., 2007). This limitation is not uncommon among RE programming. As stated by Halford and Bodenmann (2013) more recent RE programming has been unable to replicate early positive findings because participants score higher on pre-survey mean levels, limiting participant variability. In the current study for example, the couple commitment measure was based on a four-item, 5-point Likert scale. A mean of 4.40 was reported among participants at the pre-survey and a mean of 4.44 was reported at the post. Similarly, a mean of 1.67 and 1.66 was reported at pre- and post-surveys for relationship instability (a lower score is desired). This small variance in relationship outcome scores may be due to a ceiling effect, where participants cannot show improvements in the measure at post-test.

A final limitation of this study, directly related to the ceiling effect of this study is the potential selection affect among program participants; meaning those with resilient, high-functioning relationships may be self-selecting into the *Smart Steps* program. The target population for this *Smart Steps* program was at-risk, low-income, and ethnically diverse stepfamilies throughout the state of Utah, population's extant research has shown to be at-risk for relationship distress and dissolution (Bulanda & Brown, 2007; Fagan, 2006; Goodwin et al., 2010; Landale & Oropesa, 2007; Lichter & Carmalt, 2009; McNamee & Raley, 2011). Findings from this *Smart Steps* study suggest that this program was successful in targeting at-risk populations; however, these families did not represent more distressed families who report lower

pre-survey relationship quality, commitment, and higher instability scores. Therefore, this program, although targeting high-risk population groups may have in fact served more resilient, lower-risk families who self-selected into the program. Had this program served more distressed families the results from this study may have differed.

In hindsight, this study could have included additional indicators of family risk and distress to more accurately determine the risk of participating families. Such indicators could include greater variability in demographic, family process, and moderating predictor variables. For example, this study used a combined individual income variable to indicate household income as low-, moderate-, or high-income. This one indicator may not have accurately represented the diversity of family's financial distress. Perhaps other indicators of risk such as a families use of social services (e.g. Medicaid, WIC, and food stamps) and estimated poverty level could be used to more accurately identify at-risk and distressed couples. Future research, therefore, should not only target at-risk populations, but researchers should incorporate a variety of variables to accurately identify families risk levels and how various at-risk populations differ on RE outcomes.

Summary

As a means of supporting positive family functioning and sustaining healthy couple relationships, RE has become a mainstay of local, state, and federal support for families. Utilizing HMI demonstration grant funding, the current study builds upon extant literature and intervention theory by providing *Smart Steps* programming to 3,183 individuals in the state of Utah. Findings from this study show small, but statistically significant improved relationship quality among *Smart Steps* participants improved from pre-survey to six-week booster session survey. These increases in relationship quality were not sustained, with predicted scores returning to near pre-program levels one year later. No statistically significant findings were

present among couple commitment and relationship instability outcomes. Similarly, no time effects were found among examined groups, including men, women, never married, first marriage, second marriage, higher order marriage, Latinos, European Americans, and other races. The estimated combined total cost of this study was $3,238,129, with an average cost per unit of $559 per individual. This study adds to the current body of stepfamily RE and will hopefully move the field forward in serving a quickly growing population.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

IRB Approval

Protocol # 1654

Institutional Review Board
4460 Old Main Hill, SER 140
Logan, UT 84322-4460
Telephone: (435) 797-1821
Fax: (435) 797-3769

12/20/2006

SPO #: 061879
AES #. UTA00

MEMORANDUM

TO: Brian Higginbotham
Scot Allgood, Linda Skogrand

FROM: Richard D. Gordin, Acting IRB Chair
True M. Rubal, IRB Administrator

SUBJECT: Teaching Healthy Marriage Skills to Ethnically Diverse, Low-income Couples in Stepfamilies

Your proposal has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board and is approved under expedite procedure #7

X There is no more than minimal risk to the subjects.
There is greater than minimal risk to the subjects.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file for the period of one year. If your study extends beyond this approval period, you must contact this office to request an annual review of this research. Any change affecting human subjects must be approved by the Board prior to implementation. Injuries or any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board.

Prior to involving human subjects, properly executed informed consent must be obtained from each subject or from an authorized representative, and documentation of informed consent must be kept on file for at least three years after the project ends. Each subject must be furnished with a copy of the informed consent document for their personal records.

The research activities listed below are expedited from IRB review based on the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) regulations for the protection of human research subjects, 45 CFR Part 46, as amended to include provisions of the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, November 9, 1998.

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Appendix B:

Pre-Survey Evaluation Form

2011

Adult Participant Information Form

(To be completed prior to or at the beginning of the first class)

TO HELP US EVALUATE THIS PROGRAM, PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ABOUT YOURSELF AS HONESTLY AND ACCURATELY AS POSSIBLE. THERE ARE NO "RIGHT" ANSWERS. ALL RESPONSES WILL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL AND WILL NOT BE SEEN BY YOUR SPOUSE/PARTNER OR THE CLASS FACILITATOR.

First Name _____ **M.I.** ___ **Last Name** _____ **Nickname or preferred name** _____

*****How did you find out about this remarriage/stepfamily course?** _____

1. **Have you ever attended a *Smart Steps* course before?** ① Yes ② No

2. **Age:** _____

3. **Gender** ① Male ② Female

4. **Ethnic background** *(check only one):*
   ① African-American ② Asian-American ③ Caucasian ④ Hispanic/Latino
   ⑤ Native American ⑥ Bi-Racial ⑦ Unknown ⑧ Other: _____

5. **Current occupation:** *(e.g. janitor, unemployed, homemaker)* _____

6. **Are you currently:** *(check only one)*
   ① Married *(answer questions 7 and 8 then skip to 11)*
   ② In an unmarried relationship *(skip to question 9 and 10)*
   ③ Single *(skip to question 11)*

7. ***(If married…)* How long have you been married to your current spouse?**
   _____ Years _____ Months

8. **If you lived with your spouse before marriage, how long did you live together before marrying?**
   _____ Years _____ Months

9. ***(If in an unmarried relationship…)* How long have you been in a relationship with your current partner?**
   _____ Years _____ Months

10. **If you are currently living together and are not married, how long have you lived together?**
    _____ Years _____ Months

11. **How many times** *(including your current marriage)* **have you been married?** _____

12. **If you have been married before:** *(If you are still in your <u>first</u> marriage please mark "N/A" for not applicable)*

From your 1st marriage, are you:	① **Divorced**	② **Widowed**	③ **Separated**	④ **N/A**
From your 2nd marriage, are you:	① **Divorced**	② **Widowed**	③ **Separated**	④ **N/A**
From your 3rd marriage, are you:	① **Divorced**	② **Widowed**	③ **Separated**	④ **N/A**

13. **What is your current spouse's or partner's name:**

First Name _____ **M.I.** ___ **Last Name** _____ **Nickname or preferred name** _____

Office Use Only

Class: _____ Cohort: _____ ID: _____ Entered: _____

14. Will you be attending these classes with your spouse/partner? ① Yes ② No

15. How many years of school have you completed? *(High School graduate = 12; College = 13-16)* _____

16. Please indicate your primary religious affiliation *(mark only one):*

① Baptist	④ Catholic	⑦ Episcopalian
② Jewish	⑤ Methodist	⑧ Latter-day Saint
③ Atheist	⑥ No religious affiliation	⑨ Other: _____

17a. How many biological children do you have from other relationships? _____
17b. How many of your biological children, from other relationships, live with you during any part of the year? _____

18a. How many biological children does your partner have from other relationships? _____
18b. How many of your partner's biological children, from other relationships, live with you during any part of the year? _____

19. How many biological children have you and your current partner had together? ____

Do you or any of your children receive the following services?

20a.	**Free or reduced school lunches**	① Yes	② No
20b.	**Food stamps**	① Yes	② No
20c.	**Medicaid**	① Yes	② No
20d.	**Head Start or Early Head Start**	① Yes	② No
20e.	**WIC**	① Yes	② No

21. Approximately, what is your total personal income per year *(Do not include your partner's income)?*

① Less than $5,000	⑤ $20,001 to $25,000	⑨ $40,001 to $50,000
② $5,001 to $10,000	⑥ $25,001 to $30,000	⑩ $50,001 to $75,000
③ $10,001 to $15,000	⑦ $30,001 to $35,000	⑪ $75,001 to $100,000
④ $15,001 to $20,000	⑧ $35,001 to $40,000	⑫ More than $100,000

22. Approximately, what is your partner's or spouse's total personal income per year *(Do not include your own income)?*

① Less than $5,000	⑤ $20,001 to $25,000	⑨ $40,001 to $50,000
② $5,001 to $10,000	⑥ $25,001 to $30,000	⑩ $50,001 to $75,000
③ $10,001 to $15,000	⑦ $30,001 to $35,000	⑪ $75,001 to $100,000
④ $15,001 to $20,000	⑧ $35,001 to $40,000	⑫More than $100,000

23. Do you and your partner/spouse "pool" or combine your earnings? ① Yes ② No ③ Some of it

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CURRENT PARTNER/SPOUSE. IT WILL HELP US EVALUATE OUR PROGRAM. YOUR RESPONSES WILL NOT BE SEEN BY YOUR PARTNER/SPOUSE.

24. On a scale from 1 to 7, how happy are you with your relationship with your current partner/spouse?

Completely Unhappy	Moderately Unhappy	Slightly Unhappy	Neither Happy or Unhappy	Slightly Happy	Moderately Happy	Completely Happy
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

2011

25. Do you agree with the following statements about your relationship with your current partner/spouse?		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
A.	My relationship with my partner/spouse is more important to me than almost anything else in my life.	①	②	③	④	⑤
B.	I may not want to be with my partner/spouse a few years from now.	①	②	③	④	⑤
C.	I like to think of my partner/spouse and me more in terms of "us" and "we" than "me" and "him/her."	①	②	③	④	⑤
D.	I want this relationship to stay strong no matter what rough times we may encounter.	①	②	③	④	⑤

26. Regarding your current relationship…		Never	Yes, in the past but not recently	Yes, recently
A.	Have you ever thought your relationship might be in trouble?	①	②	③
B.	Has the thought of getting a divorce or separation crossed your mind?	①	②	③
C.	Have you discussed divorce or separation with a close friend?	①	②	③
D.	Have you or your partner/spouse ever seriously suggested the idea of divorce or separation?	①	②	③

27. How often do you and your current partner/spouse agree or disagree about…		Always Disagree	Frequently Disagree	Equally Agree/Disagree	Frequently Agree	Always Agree
A.	Finances	①	②	③	④	⑤
B.	Dealing with family/relatives	①	②	③	④	⑤
C.	Dealing with ex-spouses or ex-partners	①	②	③	④	⑤
D.	Parenting	①	②	③	④	⑤

28. Regarding your current relationship with your partner/spouse…		Very Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mixed	Agree	Strongly Agree	Very Strongly Agree
A.	We have a good relationship	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
B.	My relationship with my partner is very stable	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
C.	Our relationship is strong	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
D.	My relationship with my partner makes me happy	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
E.	I really feel like part of a team with my partner	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW IF THESE CLASSES HELP FAMILIES OVER TIME. WE WOULD LIKE TO SEND YOU UPDATES AND AN ANNUAL FOLLOW-UP SURVEY IN THE MAIL. PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR MAILING AND CONTACT INFORMATION.

Your Mailing Address _____ Apt. # _____ City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

(_____) _____-_____ Phone Number

(_____) _____-_____ Cell Phone Number

E-mail Address _____

IN CASE YOU MOVE, PLEASE PROVIDE THE CONTACT INFORMATION OF A FRIEND OR RELATIVE (E.G. MOTHER, NEIGHBOR, ETC.) THAT WE CAN REACH TO GET YOUR CURRENT ADDRESS.

First and Last Name _____ How is this person related to you? _____

Mailing Address _____ Apt. # _____ City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

(_____) _____-_____ Phone Number

(_____) _____-_____ Cell Phone Number

E-mail Address _____

PLEASE SEAL THIS FORM IN THE ATTACHED ENVELOPE AND RETURN IT TO YOUR CLASS FACILITATOR.

Appendix C:

Post-Survey Evaluation Form

2011

Name: _____ Site (location): _____

(Please Print)

Adult Post Program Evaluation Form

(To be completed at the end of the last class)

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ABOUT YOURSELF AS HONESTLY AND ACCURATELY AS POSSIBLE. THERE ARE NO "RIGHT" ANSWERS. ALL RESPONSES WILL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL AND WILL NOT BE SEEN BY YOUR SPOUSE/PARTNER OR THE CLASS FACILITATOR.

PART A. Please mark the appropriate box.		**Very Poor**	**Poor**	**Average**	**Good**	**Excellent**
1.	Rate the overall quality of the Smart Steps program.	①	②	③	④	⑤
2.	Rate the overall quality of the facilitator's work.	①	②	③	④	⑤
3.	Rate the overall level of participation by group members.	①	②	③	④	⑤
4	Rate the overall quality of discussions.	①	②	③	④	⑤
5	Rate the overall quality of the program materials.	①	②	③	④	⑤

PART B. Please mark the boxes that reflect your opinion BEFORE and AFTER attending the *Smart Steps* classes.

		BEFORE this class:					**Now, AFTER this class:**				
		Was Really False	**Was False**	**Was Neither**	**Was True**	**Was Really True**	**Is Really False**	**Is False**	**Is Neither**	**Is True**	**Is Really True**
1.	I understand how stepfamilies develop.	①	②	③	④	⑤	①	②	③	④	⑤
2.	I understand what it takes to have a healthy remarriage.	①	②	③	④	⑤	①	②	③	④	⑤
3.	I have a lot of parenting knowledge and skills.	①	②	③	④	⑤	①	②	③	④	⑤
4.	I understand the legal issues facing stepfamilies.	①	②	③	④	⑤	①	②	③	④	⑤
5.	I communicate well with my partner/spouse.	①	②	③	④	⑤	①	②	③	④	⑤
6.	I communicate well with all my children/stepchildren.	①	②	③	④	⑤	①	②	③	④	⑤
7.	I communicate well with my ex-partner/ex-spouse.	①	②	③	④	⑤	①	②	③	④	⑤
8.	I have good conflict management skills.	①	②	③	④	⑤	①	②	③	④	⑤
9.	There are a lot of positives in my relationship with my partner.	①	②	③	④	⑤	①	②	③	④	⑤
10.	There are a lot of negatives in my relationship with my partner.	①	②	③	④	⑤	①	②	③	④	⑤
11.	There is a lot of conflict in our family.	①	②	③	④	⑤	①	②	③	④	⑤
12.	We show respect for each other.	①	②	③	④	⑤	①	②	③	④	⑤

Please write anything that you think would improve the program, classes, and/or evaluation process.

_____

_____

_____

_____

PART C. Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements.		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	The meeting site was accessible.	①	②	③	④	⑤
2.	The length and time of sessions fit well with my work/family schedule.	①	②	③	④	⑤
3.	The program exceeded my expectations.	①	②	③	④	⑤
4.	I would refer this program to family and friends.	①	②	③	④	⑤
5.	I have learned knowledge and skills about healthy relationships.	①	②	③	④	⑤

PART D. ***PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CURRENT PARTNER/SPOUSE. IT WILL HELP US EVALUATE OUR PROGRAM.***

1. On a scale from 1 to 7, how happy are you with your relationship with your current partner/spouse?						
Completely Unhappy	Moderately Unhappy	Slightly Unhappy	Neither Happy or Unhappy	Slightly Happy	Moderately Happy	Completely Happy
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

2. Do you agree with the following statements about your relationship with your current partner/spouse?		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
A.	My relationship with my partner/spouse is more important to me than almost anything else in my life.	①	②	③	④	⑤
B.	I may not want to be with my partner/spouse a few years from now.	①	②	③	④	⑤
C.	I like to think of my partner/spouse and me more in terms of "us" and "we" than "me" and "him/her."	①	②	③	④	⑤
D.	I want this relationship to stay strong no matter what rough times we may encounter.	①	②	③	④	⑤

3. Regarding your current relationship…		Never	Yes, in the past but not recently	Yes, recently
A.	Have you ever thought your relationship might be in trouble?	①	②	③
B.	Has the thought of getting a divorce or separation crossed your mind?	①	②	③
C.	Have you discussed divorce or separation with a close friend?	①	②	③
D.	Have you or your partner/spouse ever seriously suggested the idea of divorce or separation?	①	②	③

4. How often do you and your current partner/spouse agree or disagree about…		Always Disagree	Frequently Disagree	Equally Agree/Disagree	Frequently Agree	Always Agree
A.	Finances	①	②	③	④	⑤
B.	Dealing with family/relatives	①	②	③	④	⑤
C.	Dealing with ex-spouses or ex-partners	①	②	③	④	⑤
D.	Parenting	①	②	③	④	⑤

5. Regarding your current relationship with your partner/spouse…		Very Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mixed	Agree	Strongly Agree	Very Strongly Agree
A.	We have a good relationship	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
B.	My relationship with my partner is very stable	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
C.	Our relationship is strong	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
D.	My relationship with my partner makes me happy	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
E.	I really feel like part of a team with my partner	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

Appendix D:

Booster Survey Evaluation Form

2011

Name: _____ Site (location): _____
(Please Print)

Booster Session Evaluation Form

(To be completed at the end of the booster session)

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ABOUT YOURSELF AS HONESTLY AND ACCURATELY AS POSSIBLE. THERE ARE NO "RIGHT" ANSWERS. ALL RESPONSES WILL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL AND WILL NOT BE SEEN BY YOUR SPOUSE/PARTNER OR THE CLASS FACILITATOR.

PART A. Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements.		**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neither Agree or Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
1.	The booster session was fun.	①	②	③	④	⑤
2.	The booster session was educational.	①	②	③	④	⑤
3.	Attending the booster session was worth my time.	①	②	③	④	⑤
4.	The length and time of this booster session fit well with my work/family schedule.	①	②	③	④	⑤
5.	I have learned knowledge and skills about healthy relationships.	①	②	③	④	⑤

PART B. What did you like MOST about the booster session?

_____
_____
_____
_____

PART C. What did you like LEAST about the booster session?

_____
_____
_____
_____

PART D. Please mark the boxes that reflect your knowledge BEFORE and AFTER attending the *booster session*

	BEFORE this booster session:					**Now, AFTER this booster:**				
	Was Really False	**Was False**	**Was Neither**	**Was True**	**Was Really True**	**Is Really False**	**Is False**	**Is Neither**	**Is True**	**Is Really True**
1. I understand that it may take work and time to build close relationships in stepfamilies.	①	②	③	④	⑤	①	②	③	④	⑤
2. I understand communication requires listening to understand, before responding.	①	②	③	④	⑤	①	②	③	④	⑤
3. I understand that stepfamilies can succeed if they work together.	①	②	③	④	⑤	①	②	③	④	⑤
4. I understand the need to work on all relationships in a stepfamily.	①	②	③	④	⑤	①	②	③	④	⑤

Part E. Please think about your overall experience in the Stepfamily course (6 classes AND the booster).

1. If this stepfamily course was NOT free, would you have attended? ① Yes ② No
2. How much would you be willing to pay for a stepfamily educational course such as this? $_____

Office Use Only

Class: _____ Cohort: _____ ID: _____ Entered: _____

3. What is the most important outcome/result that has occurred in your family due to participation in this course?

_____

_____

_____

PART F. ***AT THE END OF THE LAST CLASS WE ASKED A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CURRENT PARTNER/SPOUSE. PLEASE ANSWER THE QUESTIONS AGAIN TO HELP US EVALUATE THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF PARTICIPATING IN THIS COURSE.***

1. Since attending the *Smart Steps* classes, on a scale from 1 to 7, how happy are you currently with your relationship with your partner/spouse?						
Completely Unhappy	Moderately Unhappy	Slightly Unhappy	Neither Happy or Unhappy	Slightly Happy	Moderately Happy	Completely Happy
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

	2. Since attending the *Smart Steps* classes, do you agree with the following statements?	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
A.	My relationship with my partner/spouse is more important to me than almost anything else in my life.	①	②	③	④	⑤
B.	I may not want to be with my partner/spouse a few years from now.	①	②	③	④	⑤
C.	I like to think of my partner/spouse and me more in terms of "us" and "we" than "me" and "him/her."	①	②	③	④	⑤
D.	I want this relationship to stay strong no matter what rough times we may encounter.	①	②	③	④	⑤

	3. Since attending the *Smart Steps* classes…	Never	Yes, in the past but not recently	Yes, recently
A.	Have you ever thought your relationship might be in trouble?	①	②	③
B.	Has the thought of getting a divorce or separation crossed your mind?	①	②	③
C.	Have you discussed divorce or separation with a close friend?	①	②	③
D.	Have you or your partner/spouse ever seriously suggested the idea of divorce or separation?	①	②	③

	4. Since attending the *Smart Steps* classes, how often do you and your current partner/spouse agree or disagree about…	Always Disagree	Frequently Disagree	Equally Agree/Disagree	Frequently Agree	Always Agree
A.	Finances	①	②	③	④	⑤
B.	Dealing with family/relatives	①	②	③	④	⑤
C.	Dealing with ex-spouses or ex-partners	①	②	③	④	⑤
D.	Parenting	①	②	③	④	⑤

	5. Regarding your current relationship with your partner/spouse…	Very Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mixed	Agree	Strongly Agree	Very Strongly Agree
A.	We have a good relationship	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
B.	My relationship with my partner is very stable	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
C.	Our relationship is strong	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
D.	My relationship with my partner makes me happy	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
E.	I really feel like part of a team with my partner	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

Appendix E:

Six Month Survey Evaluation Form

Revised 10/09

Name: _____ ID: _____

Six Month Follow-Up Survey

AT THE END OF THE LAST CLASS WE ASKED A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CURRENT PARTNER/SPOUSE. PLEASE ANSWER THE QUESTIONS AGAIN TO HELP US EVALUATE THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF PARTICIPATING IN THIS COURSE.

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ABOUT YOURSELF AS HONESTLY AND ACCURATELY AS POSSIBLE. THERE ARE NO "RIGHT" ANSWERS. ALL RESPONSES WILL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL AND WILL NOT BE SEEN BY YOUR SPOUSE/PARTNER OR THE CLASS FACILITATOR.

PART A.

1. Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements.		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	Attending the stepfamily class was worth my time.	①	②	③	④	⑤
2.	I have referred this program to family and friends.	①	②	③	④	⑤
3.	I learned knowledge and skills about healthy relationships.	①	②	③	④	⑤
4.	I am using the knowledge and skills I learned.	①	②	③	④	⑤
5.	Attending the class has helped my family get-along better.	①	②	③	④	⑤
6.	Attending the class has helped my relationship with my partner/spouse.	①	②	③	④	⑤
7.	Attending the class has helped my parent-child relationship(s).	①	②	③	④	⑤

2. Since attending the *Smart Steps* classes, on a scale from 1 to 7, how happy are you currently with your relationship with your partner/spouse?

①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
Completely Unhappy	Moderately Unhappy	Slightly Unhappy	Neither Happy or Unhappy	Slightly Happy	Moderately Happy	Completely Happy

3. Since attending the *Smart Steps* classes, do you agree with the following statements?		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
A.	My relationship with my partner/spouse is more important to me than almost anything else in my life.	①	②	③	④	⑤
B.	I may not want to be with my partner/spouse a few years from now.	①	②	③	④	⑤
C.	I like to think of my partner/spouse and me more in terms of "us" and "we" than "me" and "him/her."	①	②	③	④	⑤
D.	I want this relationship to stay strong no matter what rough times we may encounter.	①	②	③	④	⑤

4. Since attending the *Smart Steps* classes…		Never	Yes, in the past but not recently	Yes, recently
A.	Have you ever thought your relationship might be in trouble?	①	②	③
B.	Has the thought of getting a divorce or separation crossed your mind?	①	②	③
C.	Have you discussed divorce or separation with a close friend?	①	②	③
D.	Have you or your partner/spouse ever seriously suggested the idea of divorce or separation?	①	②	③

Office Use Only

Class: _____ Cohort: _____ ID: _____ Entered: _____

5. Since attending the *Smart Steps* classes, how often do you and your current partner/spouse agree or disagree about…		Always Disagree	Frequently Disagree	Equally Agree/Disagree	Frequently Agree	Always Agree
A.	Finances	①	②	③	④	⑤
B.	Dealing with family/relatives	①	②	③	④	⑤
C.	Dealing with ex-spouses or ex-partners	①	②	③	④	⑤
D.	Parenting	①	②	③	④	⑤

6. Regarding your current relationship with your partner/spouse…		Very Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mixed	Agree	Strongly Agree	Very Strongly Agree
A	We have a good relationship	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
B	My relationship with my partner is very stable	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
C	Our relationship is strong	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
D	My relationship with my partner makes me happy	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
E	I really feel like part of a team with my partner	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

Part B. Please think about your overall experience in the Stepfamily course (6 classes AND the booster).

1. **If this stepfamily course was NOT free, would you have attended?** ① Yes ② No
2. **How much would you be willing to pay for a stepfamily educational course such as this?** $_____
3. **What is the most important outcome/result that has occurred in your family due to participation in this course?**

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. **If you did not attend all of the lessons, or you dropped out of the course, please comment on why you did not come. We are interesting in learning about the barriers and obstacles families face in attending stepfamily educational programs.**

   _____
   _____
   _____

Appendix F:

One Year Survey Evaluation Form

Name: _____ ID: _____ Revised 09/09

One Year Follow-Up Survey

AT THE END OF THE LAST CLASS WE ASKED A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CURRENT PARTNER/SPOUSE. PLEASE ANSWER THE QUESTIONS AGAIN TO HELP US EVALUATE THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF PARTICIPATING IN THIS COURSE.

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ABOUT YOURSELF AS HONESTLY AND ACCURATELY AS POSSIBLE. THERE ARE NO "RIGHT" ANSWERS. ALL RESPONSES WILL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL AND WILL NOT BE SEEN BY YOUR SPOUSE/PARTNER OR THE CLASS FACILITATOR.

PART A.

1. Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements.		**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neither Agree or Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
1.	Attending the stepfamily class was worth my time.	①	②	③	④	⑤
2.	I have referred this program to family and friends.	①	②	③	④	⑤
3.	I learned knowledge and skills about healthy relationships.	①	②	③	④	⑤
4.	I am using the knowledge and skills I learned.	①	②	③	④	⑤
5.	Attending the class has helped my family get along better.	①	②	③	④	⑤
6.	Attending the class has helped my relationship with my partner/spouse.	①	②	③	④	⑤
7.	Attending the class has helped my parent-child relationship(s).	①	②	③	④	⑤

2. Since attending the *Smart Steps* classes, on a scale from 1 to 7, how happy are you currently with your relationship with your partner/spouse?

①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
Completely Unhappy	**Moderately Unhappy**	**Slightly Unhappy**	**Neither Happy or Unhappy**	**Slightly Happy**	**Moderately Happy**	**Completely Happy**

3. Since attending the *Smart Steps* classes, do you agree with the following statements?		**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neither Agree nor Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
A.	My relationship with my partner/spouse is more important to me than almost anything else in my life.	①	②	③	④	⑤
B.	I may not want to be with my partner/spouse a few years from now.	①	②	③	④	⑤
C.	I like to think of my partner/spouse and me more in terms of "us" and "we" than "me" and "him/her."	①	②	③	④	⑤
D.	I want this relationship to stay strong no matter what rough times we may encounter.	①	②	③	④	⑤

4. Since attending the *Smart Steps* classes…		**Never**	**Yes, in the past but not recently**	**Yes, recently**
A.	Have you ever thought your relationship might be in trouble?	①	②	③
B.	Has the thought of getting a divorce or separation crossed your mind?	①	②	③
C.	Have you discussed divorce or separation with a close friend?	①	②	③
D.	Have you or your partner/spouse ever seriously suggested the idea of divorce or separation?	①	②	③

Office Use Only

Class: _____ Cohort: _____ ID: _____ Entered: _____

Appendix G:

Year-Two Dropped Data

YEAR-TWO DROPPED DATA

In the initial proposal of this dissertation, as signed by committee on June 25th, 2012, I proposed to examine the long-term effects of the *Smarts Steps* program. In doing so, I proposed to examine six data points including pre-, post-, booster-session, six month, one-year, and two-year follow-up surveys. In conducting the analysis of this data, concerns regarding the second year data arose. As shown by the table in this appendix, which is an expanded version of Table 1 in the dissertation, only 360 participants completed the year two follow-up survey.

In the conducting the HLM analysis of this study, problems arose with the findings, showing significantly skewed results of the predicted model (see Figure 1). As shown, an upward trend in relationship quality is shown two-years post-program. Upon further examination, my major professors and I determined that this skewed trend was due in large part to a large attrition rate in the data, with those who reported higher levels of relationship quality being more likely to complete year two surveys. As shown in Figure 2, among those who completed only the pre-survey, lower levels of relationship quality were reported in comparison to those who completed post-program and follow-up surveys. Similarly, those who completed every survey reported the highest levels of relationship quality.

After reviewing these results with my dissertation co-chairs, Dr. Brian Higginbotham and Dr. Jeffery Dew, we concluded that the attrition effect of year two data was significantly impacting the overall results of this study. Since the primary purpose of this study was to examine the longitudinal effects of the *Smart Steps* program, and in order to most appropriately depict the true nature of the data, my major professors recommended that I omit year two data entirely from the current study. In doing so, I would still fulfill the purpose of the proposed dissertation by examining the long-term, one year effects of the *Smart* Steps program while simultaneously avoiding the large skewing effects brought on by the second year data. This

recommendation was communicated to my dissertation committee, and upon agreement, I removed all year two data from the analysis of the current study.

Table G1

Participant Survey Completion

	Number of participants who received surveys	Number of participants who completed surveys	Response rate
Pre-Survey	3,186	2,798	87.82%
Post-Survey	2,211	2,064	93.35%
Booster Session	1,190	1,079	90.67%
6 Month Follow-up	2,325	618	26.58%
1 Year Follow-up	1,870	440	23.53%
2 Year Follow-up	1,687	360	21.34%

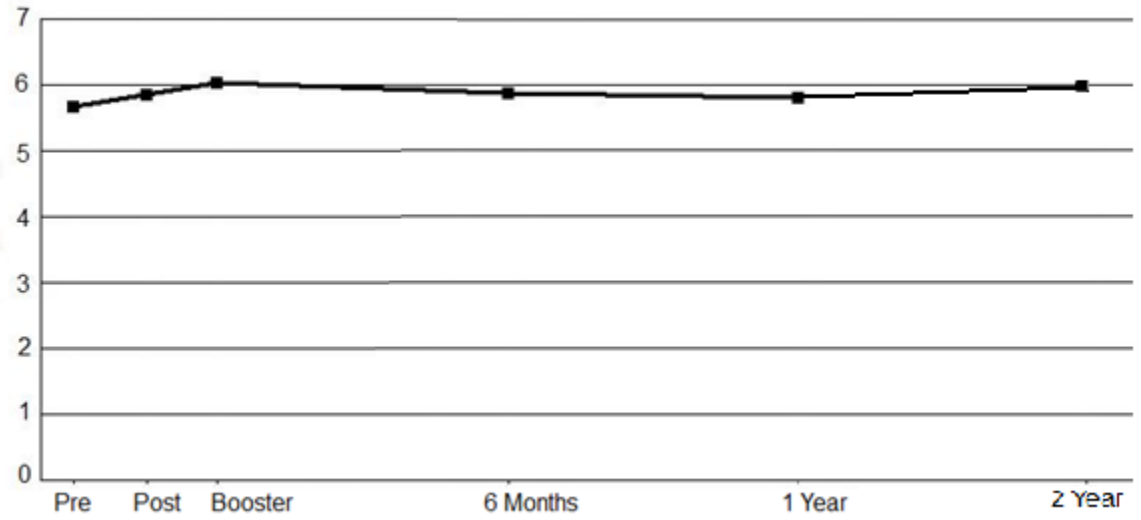

Figure G1. Relationship quality: Full model including year 2 data.

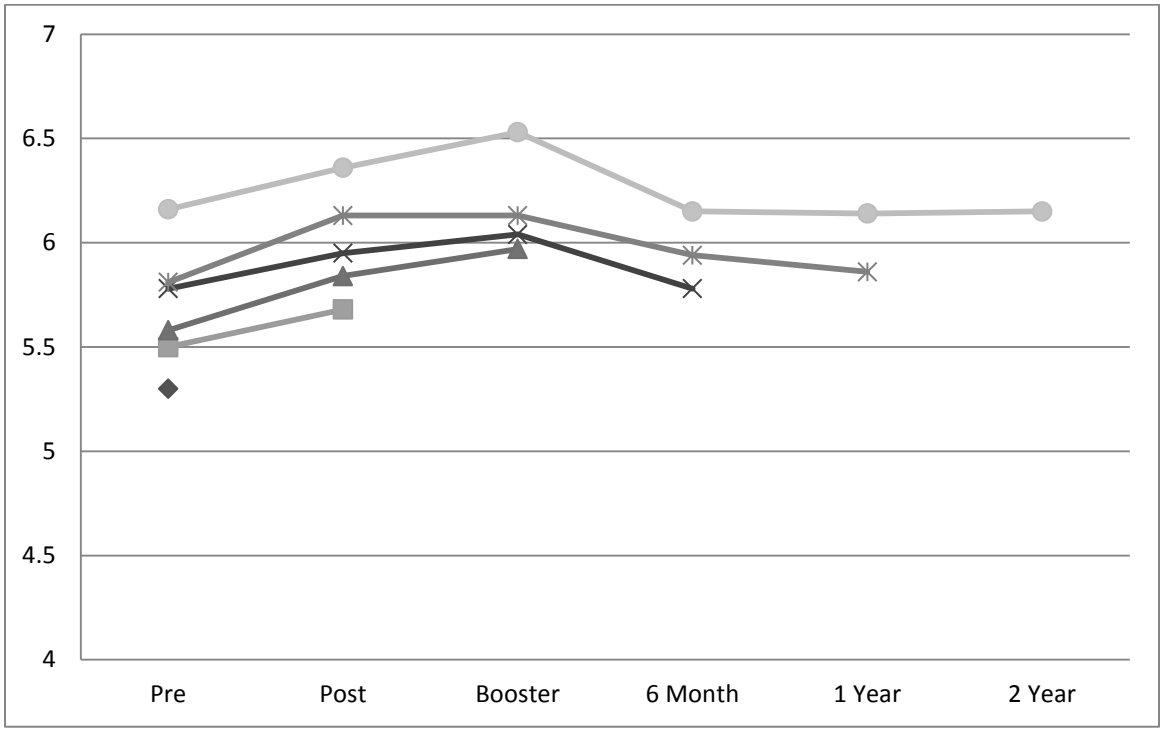

Figure G2. Relationship quality by number of surveys completed by participants.

Katie Lin Reck
Ph.D. Candidate

2705 Old Main Hill; Logan UT 84322; 435-757-9136; katie.reck@usu.edu

Education

Utah State University	Ph.D. Candidate—June 2012 Family, Consumer, and Human Development Expected graduation date: Fall 2013
Utah State University	B.S. Political Science—December 2006 Pi Sigma Alpha, Political Science Honor Society

Current Positions

Child & Family Support Center of Cache County, Inc.: June 2012 to present

Development Associate
Grant writer and program evaluator for nonprofit family service agency.

Central Michigan University: Expected start date—January, 2014

Assistant Professor, Department of Human Environmental Studies
Research emphasis on relationship education and stepfamily functioning.

Previous Research Experience

Utah State University

Fall 2012-2013	Graduate Research Assistant for Kim Openshaw, Ph.D., LCSW, LMFT (Development/evaluation of distance marriage education program)
Spring 2012	Graduate Research Assistant for Lisa Boyce, Ph.D. (Grant writing/evaluation)
Fall 2006 – 2011	Graduate Research Assistant for Brian Higginbotham, Ph.D. (Stepfamily/remarriage research and relationship education program development/evaluation)

Child & Family Support Center of Cache County, Inc.

June 2012 – present Program evaluator, survey development, grant writer, and undergraduate/ graduate student research mentor.

Research Consulting

Fall 2011 - present. Westridge Academy. South Jordan, Utah.

Fall 2011 - 2012. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Salt Lake City, Utah.

Professional Publications

Refereed Journal Publications

Reck, K., Skogrand, L., Higginbotham, B., & Davis, P. (2013). Experiences of Latino men in stepfamily education. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 54,* 231-247. doi: 10.1080/10502556.2013.773807

Reck, K., Higginbotham, B., Skogrand., & Davis, P. (2012). Facilitating stepfamily education for Latinos. *Journal of Marriage & Family Review, 48,* 170-187. doi: 10.1080/01494929.2011.631729

Higginbotham, B., Davis, P., Smith, L., Dansie, L., Skogrand, L., & **Reck**, K. (2012). Stepfathers and stepfamily education. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 53, 76-90.* doi: 10.1080/10502556.2012.635972

Skogrand, L., **Reck**, K., Higginbotham, B., Adler-Baeder, F. & Dansie, L. (2010). Recruitment and retention for stepfamily education. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy, 9,* 48-65. doi: 10.1080/15332690903473077

Higginbotham, B., **Reck**, K., & Brooks, N. (2009). Difficulties experienced among newly remarried elderly couples. *Journal of the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, 4,* 32-37.

Higginbotham, B., & **Henderson**, K**.** (2007). Using research in marriage and relationship education programming. *Forum for Family and Consumer Issues. 12(1).*

Invited Extension Publications

Higginbotham, B., **Henderson**, K., & Adler-Baeder, A. (2007). Using research in marriage and relationship education programming. In T. G. Futris (Ed.),

Cultivating Healthy Couple and Marital Relationships: A guide to effective programming (pp. 16-22). Athens, GA: National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Network.

Refereed Extension Fact Sheets

Riggs, K., **Henderson**, K., & Higginbotham, B. (2006). *4-H Mentoring: Youth and Families with Promis*e. 4-H/YFP/2007-01. Logan, UT: Utah State University.

Higginbotham, B. **Henderson**, K., & Skogrand, L. (2006). *Marital transitions and the sandwich generation: The implications of divorce and remarriage.* FR/Marriage/2006-02pr. Logan, UT: Utah State University.

Skogrand, L., **Henderson**, K., & Higginbotham, B. (2006). *Sandwich generation.* FR/Marriage/2006-01pr. Logan, UT: Utah State University.

News Articles and Releases

Skogrand, L. Higginbotham, B. & **Henderson**, K. (n.d.). *Ask the Specialist Column: Do you have any Tips for those in the Sandwich Generation?* Utah State University. Publication available online at http://extension.usu.edu/news/news.cfm?id=315.

Skogrand, L., Higginbotham, B., & **Henderson**, K. (2006, June 15). Ask a specialist: Do you have tips for those in the sandwich generation? *Utah State Today Online News.* Publication available online at http://www.usu.edu/ust/index.cfm?article=8808

Previous Teaching Experience

Instructor

FCHD 1010: Balancing Work, Marriage, and Family. Spring, 2013. Multi-instructor, team taught campus and online course; 238 campus and 98 online students.

- Campus: Overall course quality: 4.2 out of 5; Summary evaluation scores: 50 out of 63 (Discipline average: 46, Institution average: 45).
- Online: Unknown

FCHD 1010: Balancing Work, Marriage, and Family. Fall, 2012. Multi-instructor, team taught campus and online course; 246 campus and 101 online students.

- Campus: Overall course quality: 4.3 out of 5; Summary evaluation scores: 56 out of 63 (Discipline average: 52. Institution average: 51).
- Online: Overall course quality: 4.4 out of 5; Summary evaluation scores: 58 out of

63 (Discipline average: 55. Institution average: 54).

FCHD 1010: Balancing Work, Marriage, and Family. Summer 2012. Multi-instructor, team taught online course; 54 students.

- Overall course quality: 4.5 out of 5 (no department or USU comparison available)

FCHD 1500: Child and Human Development. Spring 2012. Online course, 126 students.

- Overall course quality: 4.5 out of 5 (no department or USU comparison available)

FCHD 1010: Balancing Work, Marriage, and Family. Spring 2012. Multi-instructor, team taught campus and online course; 254 campus and 112 online students.

- Campus course overall quality: 4.3 out of 5 (no department or USU comparison available)
- Online course overall quality: 4.1 out of 5 (no department or USU comparison available)

FCHD 1010: Balancing Work, Marriage, and Family. Fall 2011. Multi-instructor, team taught campus and online course; 247 campus and 98 online students.

- Overall course quality: 5.2 out of 6 (Department average - 5.2; USU average - 5.1)
- Instructor effectiveness: 5.3 out of 6 (Department average – 5.4; USU average – 5.1)

FCHD 4230: Family and Social Policy. Spring 2011, 81 students.

- Overall course quality: 5.2 out of 6 (Department average - 5.3; USU average - 5.1)
- Instructor effectiveness: 5.3 out of 6 (Department average – 5.4; USU average – 5.1)

Teaching Assistantships

FCHD 4230: Family and Social Policy. Grant Bartholomew, Fall 2011.

FCHD 4230: Family and Social Policy. Jeffery Dew, Ph.D. Fall, 2010.

FCHD 4230: Family and Social Policy. Kathleen Piercy, Ph.D. Spring, 2010.

Grant Experience

Funded Grant Experience

7/2013 Grant writer. *Programmatic Support for the Child & Family Support Center*. Sorenson Legacy Foundation. Awarded: $20,000.

7/2013 Grant writer. *Updating the Child & Family Support Centers Infrastructure: Updating Communication Services*. George and Delores Eccles Foundation. Awarded: $5,000.

5/2013 Grant writer. *Programmatic Support for the CFSC Crisis/Respite Nursery*. LDS Foundation. Awarded: $3,000.

09/2012 Grant writer. *Funding for Therapy and Educational Services at the Child & Family Support Center.* Larry H. Miller Charities. Awarded: $5,000.

08/2012 Grant writer. *Graduate Student Senate Travel Award.* Utah State University. $300. Family Consumer and Human Development Department match. $300.

08/2007 Grant writer. *Graduate Student Senate Travel Award.* Utah State University. $300. Family Consumer and Human Development Department match. $300.

Unfunded Grants

5/2013 Grant writer. *Supporting Services for the CFSC Crisis/Respite Nursery*. Bristol Myers Corporate Giving. Proposed budget: $5,000.

5/2013 Grant writer. *Programmatic Support for the CFSC*. Willard L. Eccles Charitable Foundation. Proposed budget: $13,000.

5/2013 Grant writer. *Programmatic Support for the CFSC*. Ashton Family Foundation. Proposed budget: $6,000.

5/2013 Grant writer. *Programmatic Support for the CFSC Crisis/Respite Nursery*. Questar. Proposed budget: $3,000.

5/2013 Grant writer. *CFSC ELC Cooperative Services: Providing Childcare Services for Refugee and Immigrant Families.* Ray Solem fund. Proposed budget: $3,000.

4/2013 Grant writer. *Expanding Therapy Services for Needy Populations at the Child & Family Support Center.* Walgreens. Proposed budget: $20,632.

3/2013 Grant writer. *Expanding Educational Services at the Child & Family Support Center.* Build-a-Bear. Proposed budget: $2,100.

2/2013 Grant writer. *Critical Issues Training.* Interagency Outreach Training Initiative. Proposed budget: $20,632.

11/2012 Co-grant writer. *Children's Art Fair*. Utah Department of Arts & Museums. Proposed Budget: $2,000.

10/2012 Grant writer. *Happy Healthy Babies: Supporting Expecting Mothers and New Parent Families*. March of Dimes. Proposed Budget: $4,950.

07/2012 Co-Principle Investigator. Strengthening Children and Families who Experience Trauma in Northern Utah. Submitted to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services. Proposed budget: $1,560,090.

Grants Under-Review

09/2013 Grant writer. *Engaging Families for Child Success: Increasing Outreach Programming for Under-Served, At-Risk, Northern Utah Families. The* Kellogg Foundation. Proposed budget: $250,000.

8/2013 Grant writer. Hyrum Outdoor Play Equipment. GameTime—Everybody Plays. Proposed budget: $5,000.

8/2013 Grant writer. Hyrum Outdoor Play Equipment. GameTime—Back to School. Proposed budget: $5,000.

8/2013 Grant writer. *Support for the Crisis/Respite Nursery*. Sears Holding Corporation. Proposed budget: $500.

6/2013 Grant writer. CFSC ELC Cooperative Services: Providing Childcare Services for Refugee and Immigrant Families. Rocky Mountain Power. Proposed budget: $4,050.

Other Professional Experience

Invited Trainings

2/2013 Invitation by Mike Whitesides Associate Director of Marketing. *Professional Writing.* USU Extension Annual Conference. Logan, UT.

1/2013 Invitation by Diane Reese Director of Southern Region Extension Associate Professor and Mike Whitesides Associate Director of Marketing. *Academic Publishing and Editing*. Fast Track Training. Logan, UT.

10/2012 Invitation by Diane Reese, Director of Northern Region Extension Associate Professor. *Academic Publishing and Editing.* Training to Northern Region Extension Agents. Park City, UT.

10/2012 Invitation by Kristine Saunders, Director of Southern Region Extension Associate Professor. *Academic Publishing and Editing.* Training to Southern Region Extension Agents. Richfield, UT.

09/2012 Invitation by Noelle Cockett, Vice President for Extension. *Academic Publishing and Editing.* Training to USU extension marketing personnel and editors. Logan, UT.

Curriculum Editing

4/2013 USU Extension Agents. *Building Strong Children: One Block at a Time.* USU Extension.

8/2012 USU Extension Agents. *Marriage Survival Toolkit.* USU Extension.

Professional Presentations

Refereed - National

Reck, K. & Higginbotham, B. (November, 2012). *No longer newlyweds: Difficulties experienced by remarried couples over time.* Poster accepted for the National Council on Family Relations. Phoenix, AZ.

Piercy, K. & **Reck, K.** (November, 2012). *Common methods of teaching family policy to family studies students*. Paper accepted for the National Council on Family Relations. Phoenix, AZ.

Whittaker, A., **Reck, K.**, & Boyce, L. (November, 2012). *Gaining a change of heart: A case study of youth in a residential treatment center.* Poster accepted for the National Council on Family Relations. Phoenix, AZ.

Reck, K., Higginbotham, B., & Skogrand, L., (November, 2011). *Exploring the experiences of Latino men in stepfamily education.* Presented poster at the annual

conference of the National Council on Family Relations. Awarded Best Student Paper in Education & Enrichment Section ($100). Orlando, FL.

Henderson, K., Higginbotham, B. (November, 2007). *Characteristics of rural newlywed remarriages.* Poster presented at the annual conference of the National Conference of Family Relations. Pittsburg, PA.

Higginbotham, B., Morrill, P., Allgood, S., Skogrand, L., **Henderson**, K. (November, 2007). *Documenting the effectiveness of stepfamily education.* Presented at the annual conference of the National Conference of Family Relations. Pittsburg, PA.

Morrill, P., Higginbotham, B., Skogrand, L., Allgood, S., **Henderson**, K. (November, 2007). *Recruitment and retention of stepfamilies in Family Life Education classes.* Poster presented at the annual conference of the National Conference of Family Relations. Pittsburg, PA.

State

Reck, K., Higginbotham, B., Skogrand, L., Davis, P. (April, 2011). *Facilitating stepfamily education for Latinos*. Presented paper at the annual conference of the Utah Council on Family Relations. Ogden, UT.

Reck, K., Skogrand, L., & Higginbotham, (March, 2011). *Facilitating stepfamily education for Latinos.* Presented paper at the annual Utah Conference for Family Relations. Salt Lake City, UT.

Skogrand, L., **Reck**, K., Higginbotham, B., Adler-Baeder, F. & Dansie, L. (March, 2009). *Recruitment and retention for stepfamily education.* Presented paper at the annual Utah Conference of Family Relations. Provo, UT.

Reck, K., Higginbotham, B. (March, 2008). *Difficulties experienced by remarried couples*. Presented poster at the annual Centennial Conference of Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters. Salt Lake City, UT.

Higginbotham, B. & **Henderson**, K. (October, 2005). *Serving Stepfamilies*. 60-minute satellite broadcast to county extension sited in Utah. Produced by Utah State University Extension System. Logan, UT.

Local

Gurko, K., **Reck**, K., & Roggman, L. (March, 2011). *Infant development and caregiving of mothers*. Presented poster at the annual Graduate Research Symposium, 2nd place student presentation ($50). Logan, UT.

Skogrand, L., **Reck**, K., Higginbotham, B., Adler-Baeder, F. & Dansie, L. (March, 2009). *Recruitment and retention for stepfamily education.* Presented paper at the annual Graduate Research Symposium. Logan, UT.

Reck, K., Higginbotham, B. (April, 2008). *Difficulties experienced by remarried couples*. Presented poster at the annual Graduate Research Symposium, 3rd place student presentation ($100). Logan, UT.

Higginbotham, B. & **Henderson**, K. (November, 2005). *Remarriages in Utah.* 90-minute colloquium addressed to students and faculty. Utah State University Department of Family, Consumer, and Human Development. Logan, UT.

Awards

2011 National Council on Family Relations. Education and Enrichment Section Student Proposal Award ($100). Orlando, FL.

2011 Graduate Research Symposium, 2nd place student presentation ($50).

2009 Graduate Researcher of the Year. Department of Family Consumer and Human Development.

2008 Graduate Research Symposium, 3rd place student presentation ($100).

2007 National Council on Family Relations Conference. Family Policy Section Award ($200). Pittsburg, PA.

Internships

2005 Intern for the Department of Health and Human Services. Administration for Children and Families. Washington DC.

2002 Intern for Senator Bert Marley. Idaho State Senate. Boise, Idaho.

Service

2012 NCFR conference proposal reviewer. National Council on Family Relations.

2010 Grant researcher. Downey/Swan Lake Fire District. Downey, Idaho.

2009 Grant researcher. Devils Gulch Educational Services. Nacasio, California.

Professional Organization Membership

National Council on Family Relations

Utah Council on Family Relations